A TESOL Symposium

Keeping Language Diversity Alive

Alice Springs Convention Centre
Alice Springs, Northern Territory, Australia
Wednesday, July 9, 2008

Featured Speakers
Joseph Lo Bianco
Veronica Perrurle Dobson
Stephen May

Closing Session Facilitator
Michael Christie

TESOL Symposium Sponsors:

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TESOL Symposium on Keeping Language Diversity Alive

Overview

This one-day symposium explored the complex issue of keeping indigenous and other community languages alive. Four experts investigated the reasons for language decline and extinction and discuss the processes of language maintenance and their importance for maintaining the expression of community, culture, and sense of identity.

The Australian Council of TESOL Association’s (ACTA) conference, “Pedagogies of Connection: Developing Individual and Community Identities,” was held July 10–12, 2008, in Alice Springs. ACTA chose the theme of the TESOL symposium and scheduled the symposium for the day before the ACTA conference to highlight the dynamic relationship between English language teaching and language diversity.
TESOL Symposium on Keeping Language Diversity Alive

Symposium Agenda

July 9, 2008

Alice Springs Convention Centre
Alice Springs, Northern Territory, Australia

8:30 am–9:30 am  Check in/Tea and Coffee

9:30 am–9:45 am  Welcome and Opening Remarks
• Shelley Wong, 2008-2009 President, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.
• Misty Adoniou, President, Australian Council of TESOL Associations

9:45 am–12:00 pm  Featured Speakers: Introductory Presentations
• Organizing for Multilingualism: Ecological and Sociological Perspectives
  Joseph Lo Bianco
• Keeping Language Diversity Alive: Perspectives and Practices from Central Australia
  Veronica Perrurle Dobson
• TESL and First Languages: Rights, Roles, Responsibilities
  Stephen May

12:00 pm–1:30 pm  Lunch

1:30 pm–3:15 pm  Concurrent Discussions
• Organizing for Multilingualism: Ecological and Sociological Perspectives
  Joseph Lo Bianco

• TESL and First Languages: Rights, Roles, Responsibilities
  Stephen May

3:30 pm–4:30 pm  Closing Session, Questions & Comments

Michael Christie
Organizing for Multilingualism: Ecological and Sociological Perspectives

It is widely believed that language shift resulting in the extinction of minority languages is rapidly accelerating in all parts of the world and that language revival, maintenance, and retrieval efforts have not been entirely successful. In 1994, UNESCO estimated that 90% of the world’s languages could be extinct by the mid 21st century. In this paper I review two broad approaches to reviving threatened languages and discuss the state of theory and practice in language planning to support languages. Although many view globalisation and the Internet as an unmitigated disaster for language diversity, the situation is in fact far more complex. Both provide tools for linking dispersed and small language communities across distance and offer some prospects for new forms of community that can play a positive role in supporting language diversity. Strenuous efforts in devising new or invigorating old forms of community, social intimacy, education, and literacy practices need to be explored. Through organisation and social arrangements that make multilingualism natural, communities will keep language diversity alive by simultaneously participating in wider social networks and maintaining local, language-based identities.

Joseph Lo Bianco is Professor of Language and Literacy Education at The University of Melbourne and Associate Dean (International) in the Faculty of Education. He wrote Australia’s first national policy on languages in 1987 and has been an invited consultant on language policy, bilingualism, indigenous and immigrant languages, and antiracist and multicultural education in several countries across Asia and Europe.

His recent books include *Australian Literacies* (with P. Freebody, 2001); *Australian Policy Activism* (with R. Wickert, 2001); *Voices From Phnom Penh, Development and Language* (2002); *Teaching Invisible Culture* (with C. Crozet 2003); and *Language Policy in Australia*, (Council of Europe, 2004). He has also edited a special issue of *Language Policy* titled “The Emergence of Chinese” (2007), and he has written the multilingualism chapter in the 2008 UNESCO World Report on Cultural Diversity. In preparation are an edited volume on English and identity in China and a volume on intercultural perspectives in language education.

Keeping Language Diversity Alive: Perspectives and Practices from Central Australia

Eastern and Central Arrernte is a language with 1500-2000 speakers spoken in and around Alice Springs, Northern Territory, Australia. In this presentation, Veronica Perrurle Dobson, a widely respected Arrernte Elder, describes her work as a linguist and educator promoting and maintaining the Arrernte language. She has worked on a variety of projects focused on keeping language diversity alive, including teacher education, curriculum development, traditional healing, and environmental education.

Veronica Perrurle Dobson is a widely respected Arrernte Elder and noted translator, interpreter, researcher, linguist, educator, teacher, and author. In her work promoting and maintaining the Arrernte language, she draws on her own cultural knowledge and that of
other Elders and senior healers in the Arrernte community around Mparntwe (Alice Springs) in Central Australia.

She earned the national Language Achievement Award in 2004 from the Federation of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Languages. She has a long history in linguistics, teaching children, adult education, curriculum development and advocacy. She has worked with the Van Leer Foundation-funded Arrernte Early Childhood Curriculum Project, and the National Framework for Accrediting/Teaching Australian Languages in Senior Secondary Schools, a groundbreaking project focused on bringing Indigenous language education to mainstream schools.

Veronica co-compiled the *Eastern and Central Arrernte to English Dictionary*, published by IAD Press, one of the most comprehensive dictionaries of an Australian Aboriginal language. She is also the author of *Arelhe-Kenhe Merrethene - Arrernte Traditional Healing* (IAD Press, 2007), in which she documents the use of plants and other natural products for medicinal purposes by Arrernte people.

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**TESL and First Languages: Rights, Roles, Responsibilities**

Approaches to TESL have had an ambivalent, often overtly hostile relationship toward students’ first languages. The result has been, all too often, that students' first languages have been constructed as obstacles to learning and specifically devalued or excluded from the teaching and learning process.

This paper argues that the pedagogical grounds for such an approach are weak and spurious, and are more the product of an overarching, often unquestioned ideology of English monolingualism.

In contrast, the presentation explores what rights might or should be attributable to English language learners (ELLs) in relation to their first languages, the role(s) first languages might play in TESL classrooms, and the ethical responsibilities we have as TESL teachers to foster linguistic diversity while still discharging our primary pedagogical task of teaching English.

**Stephen May** is Foundation Professor and Chair of Language and Literacy Education in the School of Education and Research Professor in the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research at the University of Waikato, in Hamilton, New Zealand. In 2008, he will be a New Zealand Fulbright Senior Scholar based at Arizona State University, Teachers College, Columbia University, and City University New York, where he will be undertaking a comparative ethnographic study of successful school-based bilingual education programs.

He began his career as a secondary teacher of English and ESL in New Zealand and has subsequently taught in universities in New Zealand, Britain, the United States and Canada.

Dr. May has written widely on language and education, with a particular focus on addressing and accommodating cultural and linguistic diversity. Areas of particular interest and expertise include language rights, bilingualism and bilingual education, indigenous
education, and multicultural education. To date, he has published seven books and more than 60 refereed academic articles and book chapters, and he has served on a variety of editorial boards.


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**CLOSING SESSION**

*Michael Christie* worked as teacher linguist in Arnhemland bilingual schools from 1972 until 1993, when he moved to Charles Darwin University in Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia. In 1994, he set up the Yolngu Studies program supporting Yolngu lecturers teaching and researching Yolngu languages and culture under Yolngu supervision. This program won the Prime Minister's award in 2005 for the best university teaching program in Australia. Since 2005 he has been investigating information technology and the intergenerational transmission of Aboriginal knowledge practices, Aboriginal philosophy and epistemology, and transdisciplinary research.
In Memory of Dr. R. Marika

Dr. Marika, one of the original featured speakers for the TESOL Symposium on Keeping Language Diversity Alive, passed away in May 2008. She was 49 years old. In a letter sent to ACTA’s leaders in May, 2008-2009 TESOL President Shelley Wong said, “On behalf of the TESOL Board of Directors, staff, and membership, I want to express my deepest sympathy and condolences to Dr. Marika’s family, friends, and colleagues, throughout Australia, and worldwide. Dr. Marika was truly a remarkable leader on many levels, in fields ranging from community development and advocacy to language teaching and research.”

TESOL received permission from Dr. Marika’s family to share one of her papers with participants at this symposium. Please write to edprograms@tesol.org to request copy of this paper.

A short bio of Dr. Marika and an overview of the presentation she was scheduled to give at the TESOL Symposium on Keeping Language Diversity Alive are enclosed below.

Dr. Marika is a woman of the Rirratjingu clan, daughter of Roy Dadaynga Marika. As Yirrkala Dhanbul Council chairperson in the 1970s, she guided Yirrkala through extremely tough times of change. Raymattja has extensive experience with outside academic and government institutions and is a 2007 Territorian of the Year, a council member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, and on the board of directors of Reconciliation Australia. She led the development of curriculum for the education of Yolngu youth as well as the teaching of Yolngu languages and culture to outsiders at Charles Darwin University, which also awarded her an honorary doctorate. Currently, she is Co-Director of the Mulka Project, based in Yirrkala, Northern Territory, Australia, which is introducing meaningful employment and empowerment to the Yirrkala community through use of digital media. She works with the young employees to help their literacy skills in both English and Yolngu, works on translation and documentation projects, and represents the community’s interests to outside institutions.

Keeping Culture and Language Strong Using Ancient Yambirrpa Fishtrap Metaphors

In 2005, we rebuilt the Yambirrpa (stone fishtrap) as an education workshop. This involved consulting and negotiating permission with the right people in the lead up to the workshop. All the students heard the dhawu (story) about the fisherman and the ancestors from the elders.

I will talk about how the Yambirrpa story is used as a philosophy of shaping Yolngu knowledge. It has powerful imagery and analogies that help shape the visions of the elders in everyday life, through reliving the culture of the past. Yambirrpa is also used as a metaphor of giving, sharing, and building strong relationships in the community and school. The fish trap is secure and sound so no fish can escape, like keeping the kids in the school together. The rocks can be seen as the foundation and the elders sitting there who hold that place together and look after the education interests of the school. This helps the school council and the teachers maintain and deliver strong Yolngu and ngapaki (non-
Yolngu education. We want our children to think cognitively and be prepared for the challenges they have to face in the future, to make future pathways under the guidance of those elders.
In this paper I argue that linguistic diversity is one of the most common characteristics of human history, and therefore we could consider it a “natural” characteristic of humanity. Linguistic diversity combines with interaction among human groups and this produces bilingualism (I use this term as a shorthand for multiple language skill) and other modes of communicating across our differences.

Bilingualism, understood here as functioning in more than one language, in which many individuals and most groups use more than one language code for communication, is usually organised purposively, meaning that we have communication skills that are differentiated according to purpose, function, or interlocutor. All this makes for a very complex picture of language capabilities.

Today, with economic globalisation, the “widening, deepening and speeding up of world wide interconnectedness,” (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999, p. 2), population mobility, and information and communication technologies that produce instantaneous links across great distances, there is great stress on communication and far less on diversity. As a result some kinds of bilingualism have become strong, additive, and materially rewarded, whereas other kinds of bilingualism have become fragile, unstable, and fading. The kinds of bilingualism that have become strong and attractive tend to be those that involve the addition of instrumentally useful languages, especially but not only English, to uncontested national languages of secure national states.

The term additive bilingualism is sometimes used to describe this kind of bilingualism, in which an individual, or a community, invest, both psychologically and materially, in gaining skill and using a language while retaining a secure role and permanent presence for their original or native language. Some examples are the learning of English by Brazilians, Japanese, Chinese, or Dutch nationals; the learning of French by English-speaking Canadians; or the learning of Chinese, Italian, or Japanese by Australians.

By contrast the type of bilingualism that has been rendered unstable has been that of minority populations, including the languages of subnational communities in these states, such as non-Han populations in China, indigenous peoples in Brazil, Australia, the United States, and elsewhere. The term I will use for this kind of bilingualism is subtractive, which means that the second or acquired language often comes to dominate the learners’ original or native language. Immigrants to Australia, Canada, or France acquire the national languages of those countries but over time lose their original language. Indigenous populations can also shift to the use of a dominant language, whether the main language of their national community or a regional language, but in this process their original language loses its hold on their personal and social life. The
bilingualism is therefore temporary, a transitional phase between one communicative state (whether it was monolingual or bilingual) and its replacement by another communicative condition, usually monolingual use of the dominant, acquired, new language.

Language diversity therefore is a term that captures very different sociolinguistic realities, more diverse even than the ones I can speak about here. In these realities there are often trends and patterns that are radically different from what applies in other settings, because patterns of language use are influenced by the specific histories that apply in different contexts and because language use reflects a very complex mixture of identity and practical material reality. Language is therefore both symbolic (it symbolises our attachments, our sense of our selves, what kinds of belonging we wish to invoke and display) and at the same time responds to the practical conditions with which we are surrounded where some languages offer more practical benefits than others. These languages are used in education, the media, business and commerce, international contexts, and so on, and therefore they have more rewards and more power than other languages. There are some generalisations we can make, many things we can learn, and some experiences we can transport from one setting to another, but we must also be careful not to assume that too much can be carried from one setting to another and expect that identical circumstances, possibilities, or problems will apply.

Subtractive language diversity is typically the bilingualism of small, dispersed, or mobile communities, of colonised peoples and of marginalised populations. Subtractive language diversity and situations of language loss across generations (intergenerational language shift) are often studied by professionals interested in the possibility of what is increasingly called reversing language shift.

THREE KINDS OF WORK

Language shift is the result of processes of colonisation, arrested development for some languages, and therefore of inequality in the social, economic, and technological supports for some languages. In damaging language diversity and reducing the number of active, healthy human languages, there have been the most important processes of human change over long periods of time. To have any chance of reversing the language shift that history has produced, we will have to do three kinds of work: ideological work, social work, and linguistic work.

I want to claim that we need to undertake these three kinds of work simultaneously, to reverse or at least stall the erosion of language diversity and to substitute additive for subtractive bilingualism for marginalised, poor, oppressed, or isolated communities. To make more and more languages healthy, it is crucial to make more and more communities healthy; we will need to create the right conditions, and this will require ideological work, social work, and linguistic work.

In this paper I discuss the history that has produced a major weakening of the linguistic diversity of the world and apply the principles from the first part of the paper to the
specifically Australian experience, one of the most dramatic, important, and desperate in the world.

THE RED BOOK AND THE NATIONAL STATE

In the early 1990s the United Nations, through its specialised agency dealing with education, science, and culture, UNESCO, became alarmed and sought to make others alarmed about language extinction and subtractive bilingualism. Its alarm took the form of a Red Book. The Red Book noted that professional linguists calculated that up to 90% of the world’s approximately 6,700 languages were threatened with extinction within a few generations and called on world leaders to take drastic action to protect minority language communities.

Subtractive language diversity, the failure to retain original languages in active use as individuals and groups acquire dominant languages, can lead to language loss for individuals, groups, or whole communities. For individuals language loss happens when they are the only ones to abandon their first language and use only the newly acquired language. For groups it happens when a specific group of speakers replaces its original language with another language but other groups remain who speak the same original language. This occurs mostly to immigrants who move from a homeland where that language is dominant or secure to another country where that language is marginal. Even though there is language loss for that community of speakers, the language itself is not endangered. Here we see the distinction between a homeland and a diaspora. The third and most extreme kind of subtractive bilingualism, leading to the extinction of minority languages, occurs when the entire community of speakers of a given language shifts to using a replacing language exclusively.

The national state is the key social structure which has accelerated and, in many instances, produced these processes of profound language change, known as language intergenerational language shift and language extinction.

The first kind of shift occurs when scattered individuals, or small groups, cease to use a language and transfer to using another. The effect is on those individuals and the proportion of the total use of that language which they represent. The second kind of shift occurs when whole organic units of speakers of a dispersed language cease to use that language and transfer to using a replacement code. The communicative effect is on those communities alone and the proportion of the total use of that language which they represent. The third mode of shift occurs when the total speaker population of a language ceases to use that language and transfers its communicative efforts to one or more other languages. The communicative effect in these extreme cases rebounds not only on those communities but on the total use of that language, and therefore its very existence. This is when language extinction occurs.

In my view, the critical context and instrument via which most, perhaps not all, language shift occurs, and certainly the agentive structure most relevant to the Australian context, is the national state. The national state is a form of political organisation, a way to
manage and administer geographic and political territory (geopolitical space). The national state is characterised by one crucial feature that makes it relevant for language ecology: the expectation in national states that there should be a symmetrical correspondence between the cultural characteristics of the residents who constitute a state and the structures of authority of that state. This critical point will become clearer later, when I explicate what is not a national state.

**Before the National State**

Before the formation and emergence of national states, which is an historically recent occurrence for the most part (though it does have ancient roots), most states, most European states, will be called here *prenational*. The European case is of course essential to understanding most of the new world settings of language shift, because of the vast expansion of European colonial rule, the creation of the so called new world, in which the model of statehood that was applied came from the European experience. One way to think of the prenational state is to think of feudalism, in which rulers were either church hierarchies or local lords loyal to distant monarchs. In both cases, dynastic monarchs, and ecclesiastical authorities, were extranational; that is, they tended to be located far away or be linked by family and faith across great distances. As a result, the rulers and the ruled tended to be linked together by faith or economy in a hierarchically organised relationship. The rulers mostly wanted the ruled only to pay their taxes, foment no trouble, be available for military service, and uphold the faith. Other than these requirements, the local cultural, and therefore linguistic, life of communities was of little interest to rulers.

The rulers of prenational states did not seek to “bond” with their subjects; the status of citizen only arose later. The ruled were for the most part subjects, residents, or denizens of states that took little actual interest in their lives. Many prenational states in Europe, therefore, were highly linguistically diverse. Europe is where the bulk of this story arises, where the critical formation of the national state happens earliest and takes deepest root, and from where it is exported most widely. From this process of export, the national state has come to be regarded, in a virtually unremarked way, as the only way in which geopolitical space is divided, constituted, and governed.

The ruled therefore could and did make local bonds, of language, identity, and culture. The governing ideologies of the states were religious and dynastic. The ruled were required to adhere to the strict ways in which the extra-local, or supra-national, church required faith to be demonstrated and to display political loyalty to transnational dynastic and imperial houses. This unique combination of local feudalism and transnational cultural elites we mostly recall for its poverty and degradation, but it was also a time of flourishing linguistic diversity.

Transnationally, the language of communication was an elite form of a dynastic language, most commonly Latin. This common transnational language allowed medieval universities to flourish, and the immense spaces of the European landmass to be collectively governed by combinations of canon law and dynastic rule. Some scholars have called this period a *Republic of Letters* because elites could communicate and forge
bonds of identity across what are today a vast number of relatively small independent, autonomous political states.

**Inventing Nations and States**

Over a long period of time, and in different ways at different times and places, the vast territories governed in more or less this way ceded to a new kind of governance, the national state. I will mention only critical points of many that are possible. First Dante, second Herder, and third the Jacobins. Dante Alighieri was Italy’s pre-eminent poet, writing in the early 14th century, and he can be cited as the originator of the European movement for the vernacular.

Dante wanted to devise a distinctive and missing language, Italian, with the express purpose of organising the political territory people called Italy but which, lacking a unifying language and symbol of collective identity, was composed instead of many disparate small states. Because these states were small and feuding with each other, they were subject to continual external invasion and occupation from states that were militarily more powerful. In an important work, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, written 1303–1305, Dante theorised on language planning and proposed a method for inventing this new language and for encouraging its learning and use. He then wrote his major work, the *Divine Comedy*, in that language, establishing it as an authoritative and admired linguistic form.

Dante’s dream that a distinctive language would produce a distinctive and independent state was not accomplished for about 550 years, depending on how and what we count, after he imagined it, but his theorisation of the vernacular and its role in forging a sense of national identity, linked to the practice of engineering its creation, were decisive in both the Italian and wider European project of inventing the nation. This nation idea was built on the foundation of linguistic forms.

A later, but crucially important phase, we owe to Gottfried Herder an 18th-century German romantic philosopher, living much later than the Florentine poet. Herder was reacting against the science, empiricism, and positivism of the Enlightenment philosophers in his own country (though Germany as we know it today did not exist, and its birth was not unrelated to Herder’s ideas).

In response to the Enlightenment thinkers’ science of society, and especially those travelling in India and noticing that Sanskrit had nonrandom connections to Latin and ancient Greek, Herder argues instead for languages and identity. The links between the ancient languages of India and Europe, Sanskrit, Latin, and Greek, led many thinkers to stress what made humans similar, what we share despite surface differences, what were underlying shared characteristics, using this wider overarching linguistic unity to postulate common culture and identity.

But for Herder, what makes Germans uniquely, essentially German, was their use of the German language. German was the spirit language of German peoplehood and identity;
what it shared with other languages, whether European or north Indian, could not detract from its unique status as the definer of a German essence. Herder extends this claim to other language communities and makes a decisive contribution to the idea, and the ideal, that we are defined by and through language and its characteristic uses, imagining language as a definer of the unique cultural characteristics of peoples.

The Jacobins add an explosive element to this mixture of concepts. In the dramatic reconstruction of dynastic society unleashed in revolutionary France at the end of the 18th century, the Jacobin revolutionaries argue that a state must offer equality to its people. *The people* are not to be subjects of dynastic rule, of a monarch, but citizens of a republic in which they are equal and fraternal, and being citizens requires access to the same language. Today, many of us would call what the Jacobins were arguing for “sameness,” and this would carry a negative connotation, but it was a truly revolutionary notion at the end of the 18th century in a Europe in which prenational states dominated and in which the idea of equality ignited rebellion against the old order.

This notion of equality through sameness was predicated not only on speaking the same language, but the same prestige educated variety of language, essentially literate standard Parisian French, inaugurating state monolingualism. In the specific case of revolutionary France, this took the form of a specific campaign to stamp out dialects, considered vestiges of feudalism that kept their speakers trapped in ignorance and local identities.

This compound reached further depth with the industrial revolution and the invention of schools, or rather of schooling, as education, or training, in mass and compulsory literacy, unilingually. Herder, and other philosophers and romantics like him, say that we belong through speaking the same language, that we should form political entities with those with whom we belong culturally. The Jacobins and other implementers of the republican revolutionary ideals, say that we gain identity as equal citizens of a republican state. This new identity should incorporate the entire population and eradicate difference, because difference means inequality. Here the rulers and ruled become the same, politically as well as culturally. The distinctive contours of the national state become more clearly etched. The industrial revolution, and some of the associated democratic reforms, incorporated entire populations into compulsory schooling aiming to make everyone literate, and this entrenched a hierarchy of linguistic forms through mass, schooled, obligatory literacy. Herder invented a cultural community, the Jacobins a political community, industrialism added a literate economic community.

This, so far, would be an important and interesting European story, but it becomes an important and interesting world story because the Europeans spread the nation state idea through imperial expansion and colonial adventure. This is not to deny that in some, perhaps many, of the places they planted these ideas that there were not emergent or even developed notions of language as a marker of distinctiveness. Indeed Japan and Korea look a lot like the monolingual story invoked in Europe. But these were pre-industrial formations, similar to the pre-industrial, premodern equivalents of local identities that existed in some parts of Europe, too.
The association of monolingual nationality and statehood, the invention of the national state, its association with modernity, and republican citizenship, received its massive boost in the crucible of European nationalism. Even in states that didn’t become formally republican, such as Britain, the processes of limiting the monarchy took very similar pathways to those identified and produced in the national-state republics of 19th-century Europe. These republics then exported, and imposed, ideologies of unilingual nationalism on a massive scale across the world.

It is no accident, then, that when we look at the distribution of spoken languages today, according to the Ethnologue database, only about 3% of the world’s language diversity that is not from recent immigration is in Europe. This is a lower percentage than Papua New Guinea alone. This statistic conveys the force of monolingual state making, the European nations had the earliest and deepest effects of the idea of making citizens, and making them equal and the same, through common singular national languages.

**The Postnational State?**

In recent decades, the process of economic globalisation has led some scholars to boldly predict the extinction of the nation state. Although it is true that globalisation is producing some social, economic, and cultural conditions that resemble the prenational state, it is too early to predict its demise. It is certainly true, however, that there is a decline in the exercise of exclusive national sovereignty. It is also true that something like a postnational state is emerging, if we are clear that we mean the decline of the autonomous, bounded, romantic, and controlling national state. In any case, the tendency is clear. Transnational capitalism is accompanied worldwide by burgeoning extranational identities and, ironically enough, most strongly and deeply in Europe with the emergence there of the European Union, a supranational and nation challenging polity.

Citizenship itself, that legal instrument for attaching disparate peoples to the same state, is an excellent demonstration of how deeply these changes seek to go. Despite the ideals of the revolutionaries that all would be equal in the new republican dispensation, in fact segmented membership of political communities has always existed. Formal citizenship is the only social role (potentially) shared by all adults and de facto it has classically been segmented by property, age, sex, birthplace, and language. Major forms of exclusion from membership in the political community have always existed, and these have meant that the espoused ideals of the nation-makers have always fallen short of realities. Language has been a crucial form of exclusion, and today, under conditions that erode the exclusive hold of the national state, we see how the expansion of English worldwide and the greater complexity of public life have raised the barriers for citizenship participation.

Today we can identify many flows of population, products, ideas, knowledge, cultural forms, and identities, all facilitated by instantaneous and relatively widely available communications technologies, but also migration, student mobility, and politics of resistance against national homogenisation. Together these show signs of restoring some of the prenational state conditions of local linguistic diversity, or rather of a scrambling of the association of exclusive sameness between rulers and ruled in cultural terms.
So, we have three kinds of work: reversing language shift, Red Book, and postnational state.

GLOBALISATION AND ENGLISH

In some ways global English is tantamount to what we mean by the very process of globalisation itself, the expansion across the whole globe of single systems of life that originate is specific localities. The expansion of English arose from a unique historical contingency, the fact that, for the first and only time in history, a transfer of power from one hegemonic regime to another was effected within the same language. This occurred of course after the Second World War when with the decline in British imperial reach and its transfer to American economic and military muscle. The link between languages of teaching and learning and social, economic, and military conditions is evident in the analysis by Yun Kyung Cha and Seung Hwan Ham (2008), who compare the choice of first foreign language (FFL) in the curricula of primary and secondary schools across the world over the past 155 years. Their data are like a barometer testing the atmospheric temperature of the world as revealed by the acquisition of the languages of dominant powers, revealing dramatic and rapid redistribution of the languages learned for communicating beyond national frontiers. They divide the period 1850-2005 into seven phases and for each of these contrast the presence of five “European” languages, English, French, German, Russian, and Spanish, as FFL in education systems. The number of countries represented in the survey grows from 15 and 12 for the primary and secondary levels in the 1850–1874 phase, to 151 and 154 for primary and secondary respectively in 1990–2005 phase.

Initially foreign language teaching was confined to secondary schools with German dominant, French prominent, and English marginal, and Spanish and Russian missing altogether. World events meant that German lost its place mainly to French, but also to English; English then took the enrolments devoted to French; after the Cold War, Russian had a temporary emergence, especially during the Cold War, but lost its presence to English, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Spanish might figure very prominently in the United States, but its presence worldwide is minuscule compared to English, and indeed in Asia, English counts in all cases as the first foreign language. It is not surprising, in light of these figures, that Graddol (2006) identifies English as possibly being spoken, learned, or known by up to half the world’s population at some stage in the near future. In this context, it is notable that English comes to serve not so much as a foreign language at all, but as a basic skill. Nor is it surprising, therefore, that knowing English comes to represent a factor in its own right in the social and political distribution of bilingualism, whether subtractive or additive in the world today.

DISTRIBUTION OF BILINGUALISM

The European Union has collected statistics called the Euro-Barometer for many years concerning diverse aspects of social life in EU member states. Combining the data from
these figures (see Lo Bianco, 2001), the pattern of the distribution of bilingualism appears to be, broadly speaking, as follows, according to states, societies, and individuals.

- **States:** Bilingualism increases in smaller states located near larger and more powerful states, and in non-English-dominant states over English-dominant states.
- **Societies:** Bilingualism increases if the society is not subject to the unilingual modernity ideology that was generated in European-national-state formation, as argued earlier. The strongest case would be India, where national belonging is less dependent on distinctive monolingualism than in other states, though this is not to overlook language conflicts that are experienced in India, too.
- **Individuals and groups:** Bilingualism increases when an individual’s occupation rewards learning an additional language, such as we see in the Euro-Barometer studies (see Table 1), and when the retention of the minority language accords with the core values of a particular group. This core values thesis explains why some immigrant groups are more attached to passing on their ancestral language intergenerationally than other groups. The literature (Fishman, 2001) also has examples of groups struggling against repression which is directed at their distinctive language are in some cases more attached to its maintenance.

The picture of the distribution of bilingualism is therefore very complex. The Euro-Barometer studies show a very interesting detailed pattern (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Who Is Bilingual in Europe?**

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<tr>
<th>Socio-demographic category</th>
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<td>Students</td>
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<td>Educated up to 20+</td>
<td>72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
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<td>Employees</td>
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<td>Self-employed</td>
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<td><strong>Average for EU 15</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Retired</td>
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*Note.* Reproduced from Lo Bianco (2001).
BILINGUALISM IN ENGLISH-DOMINANT COUNTRIES

For the most part, the EU bilingualism is additive, involving the learning of foreign languages, especially English, but also others, by upwardly mobile, and prominent people in society. These social categories (e.g., students, educated up to 20+, managers, self-employed) are not marginal or poor segments of society but the more educated, monied, and future oriented. The European context, therefore, appears to have markedly overcome its historic monolingual state making and produced a transnational economy and a supranational political entity, the EU that is encouraging and supporting the learning of languages and the acquiring of bilingualism. These are not, however, minority or indigenous languages but languages of trade, commerce, education, and popular culture.

This distribution is rather dramatically different from what is typical in four key English-dominant societies: Australia, Britain, New Zealand, and the United States. I want to make some broad generalisations regarding these four English-dominant countries based on personal observation of language education debates in these settings and my reading of census data and studies. It seems to me that the bulk of the bilingualism in these countries is subtractive rather than additive and mostly located in three broad social categories or populations: indigenous peoples, immigrants, and individuals from mainstream communities.

Indigenous populations are typically isolated communities or communities whose social, economic, and political power is marginal. They are linguistically under stress and face continual language extinction pressure. Immigrants are more typically in urban communities, but they too are under assimilative language shift pressure. Individuals from mainstream communities who become bilingual are typically professionals, enthusiasts, oddballs, or elites extending cultural capital by adding a prestige cultural asset. In this case, although the bilingualism is certainly additive, it is typically a personal attribute. This kind of bilingualism may be quite different in Canada, where English speakers’ acquisition of French is more mainstream and involves the acquisition of a skill more likely to be a stable attribute of the communicative load of the society.

The pattern of bilingualism found in the EU is generationally more stable and socially rewarded than the pattern found in the four English-dominant countries, where bilingualism tends to be more individualized and marginal. What does this mean for the transmission of bilingualism to younger generations? What are the prospects for longer term maintenance of bilingualism in the two settings?

Essentially, the bulk of bilingualism in the four English-dominant settings relies for its reproduction on stressed systems of socioeconomic marginal communities, that is, recent immigrants and indigenous populations. Language maintenance among immigrant populations is classically intergenerationally unstable (Clyne, 2005) and shares with indigenous populations the characteristic of operating, often, via disrupted systems of transmission. The classic transmission systems are the intimate relations of child-rearing and primary socialisation, these being ruptured by colonialism, compulsory state schooling, and often by cultural dislocation, family breakdown and erosion of traditional
networks of social life and authority hierarchies. Although bilingualism is additive for enthusiastic individuals and professional groups (teachers, linguists, interpreters, translators, etc.), it is rarely self-generating because its acquisition is via secondary socialisation systems, formal education mostly, and is not typically transferred in families.

These patterns, allowing for a measure of generalization and speculation, essentially mean that the bulk of the national bilingualism of the main English inner circle societies relies on formal education for its production and transmission system. Formal education is far less successful in transmitting the its component of bilingualism, the second language, than the home is in transmitting its component of the bilingual skill, the first language. Formal education often succeeds in replacing home-acquired language proficiency with school-taught language proficiency, but far less successfully does it convey proficient bilingual skills. Understood this way, it is clear that formal education underperforms compared to home-generated language skills. In any case it is not self-generating and depends on major political agitation from communities to bend education towards the language rights, interests and needs of minority communities. The stubborn refusal to readily concede to such demands recalls the formative role that schooling has played in the making of national states and in the reproduction of the skills that national economies require rather than in reflecting the constituent differences of a community. It is clear that keeping language diversity alive in postcolonial settings that are open to immigrants will require collaboration between home and school environments.

The Australian context is one of the more complex linguistic demographies in the world, classifiable under three broad, but each internally complex, groupings. The unique and initial classification must be the indigenous category, counting originally some 250 distinct languages, representing an original dialect continuum of 600 or more, and today highly differentiated according to contact varieties, pigeons, creoles, and vast erosion of vitality. The settler group involves the transplantation of southern forms of British English to the Australian landscape and setting, the interaction of these with Irish and other varieties, and the emergence of relatively homogenous kinds of national English across the country, similar to the greater degree of internal variation of American Englishes. The demography of the immigrant group has greatly variegated the Australian linguistic landscape, introducing far more than 160 languages, each of course then subject to modification to reflect new landscape, new communicative ecologies, and new statuses.

Public debates about language in Australia, unsurprisingly, make recourse to a vastly more simplified set of categorisations. For the most part, debates rely on simple, often erroneous, groupings of Asian, European, and Aboriginal, or foreign and community. The foreign and community grouping is directly relevant to the prospects for keeping language diversity alive, however, and will be discussed in the section. The discussion will focus on the institutional status of minority languages, the norms of use and correctness, and the local ways to appreciate, advocate, and understand their social roles.
FOREIGN AND COMMUNITY

In one important respect there are no languages that could realistically be imagined as subjects on the school curriculum which are not present in the Australian population. Some commentators rely on this fact to argue that the category foreign language is inappropriate and that we shouldn’t speak of the teaching of foreign languages. However, this argument runs up against some key problems. First, policy is often based on the idea of teaching languages that are spoken in “foreign countries” and which are to be taught for facilitating relations with those countries. Perhaps more significant, however, is that the term foreign, which can be taken to mean “absent from” is very much applicable in some indigenous settings in Australia, in relation to English. English is acquired even within Australia in several settings as a foreign, not a second language, that is, English is absent from the learner’s community to such an extent that it isn’t available for inductive learning or informal acquisition. If this is true within Australia, it is clearly more often true outside of the country. Therefore, because policy is often based on this understanding, reflecting the persistence of national state ideologies that speak of single countries having single languages, it is important to discuss the foreign–community distinction more fully in relation to what it might offer as information for supporting language maintenance and language diversity efforts.

There are three ways at least to distinguish the social meaning and status of community from foreign language. I call these institutional status, local norms, and local discourses. Community languages are typically, if not always, significantly supported by “owned” schools, local clubs and societies, and religious and cultural centres. In effect, a community language is one which is materially present in a range of institutional structures that aim to teach, reinforce, or transmit the language, and, importantly, which naturalistically use the language to transmit local occupational opportunities, support local media in various genres of representation, and perform local activities of community recreational, economic, civic, and religious life. These institutional settings and functions for a language supply it with concrete functional activities for which it is used, either exclusively or in concert with English.

In this way a community language is one which is associated with a diaspora culture; that is, local experiences and expressive norms arise in local settings in which the community language is the exclusive or main linguistic code. Even in settings where the language is not the exclusive or even the main code, but where it is used alongside English, where, in effect, its use does not need to be explained, justified, or remarked upon, I believe that the language qualifies for community institutional status. Of course these institutional settings vary in the degree of vitality and functional range accorded to the minority community language, well depicted in Fishman’s (2001) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) scale for assessing vitality, but the essential argument here is to stress institutional location rather than to evaluate vitality.

Institutionalisation of a language in mainstream schools offers students who study the language, as distinct from a foreign language, both in-school and out-of-school
Local norms emerge from this local institutional reality and produce the distinctive ways of speaking a language that make it “local.” For community languages of immigrant origin, homeland institutions sometimes repudiate or repress these norms; are condescending towards them; embarrassed by them; or regard them as comical, quaint, or antiquated. The extent to which these characterisations are resisted suggests the level of local vitality or the possibility that a local variety based on such norms might emerge and might seek eventually to be codified in a set of authoritative local depictions of the community language.

Local norms reflect local bilingual realities and bring the new context into the language, reflecting the sociolinguistic communicative reality and identity of immigrant users. Inevitably entering a complex connection with the “standard,” authoritative—but strictly foreign—form, local norms (e.g., accent, word and script-blends, code-switching) have the power to resist as well, when the diaspora community is alienated from its homeland source.

Local discourses refer to how speakers talk about, behave towards, and understand being a speaker of a minority language, essentially how they represent this reality in their description to others, both outsiders and insiders. The discursive representation of the community language suggests how its speakers regard it and themselves as its unique representatives, how they rank the “minority” part of themselves in relation to the skills, behaviour, attitudes and roles they are accorded and can play in wider society. The discourse relates to both the locally dominant language, English in Australia, and to the authoritative forms of the homeland standard of the community language. In this way, the community language is very different from a foreign language, living a life of subaltern existence beneath the esteem of both the dominant local and the dominant foreign.

These considerations can play a major role in the work that needs to be done to keep language diversity alive and in how a diaspora positions itself in relation to the homeland.

REVERSING LANGUAGE SHIFT

It is sobering to begin this consideration of reversing language shift with two reflections from pioneers of the language planning field, Andrew Gonzalez and Joshua Fishman. Gonzalez, a key figure in the systematic language planning initiatives in the Philippines, once remarked that “benign neglect is better than deliberate language planning.” (Gonzalez & Bautista, 1986, p. 47; Hau & Tinio, 2003, p. 337). Gonzalez was reflecting on the difficulty of achieving the goals of language planning, the frequent failure of language policies to “deliver the goods.” Similarly, during the 1980s Fishman, reflecting on many attempts to “save” minority languages via schools, once remarked that advocates of language maintenance rely on schools for support, a role for which they are often ill-suited, and pointed out that they often lead to the hastening the loss or abandonment of minority languages.
In introducing this task of reversing language shift, let us look at the instructive and important case of Ireland (O’Riagáin, 1988). Ireland is especially important because of the sustained effort to bring Irish back into vitality, and the contrast between the success of formal “restoration” policies, that is, giving Irish status in the laws, constitution, and other legal structures of the country; the strong presence of the language in the education system; and yet the broad failure to encourage its use. Irish was a strong symbol of Irish independence and was allocated official status in the constitution after independence in 1922; it was made a compulsory subject and to a much lesser extent also a medium of instruction. Many millions have studied it; about 1.4 million know it, but only about 65,000 are considered active users.

This case raises the issue of the relationship between attitudes towards a language (in Ireland they are positive), ability or competence (not always high), and actual use (relatively low). Essentially, Irish reflects a crisis in the relation between school and out-of-school settings, between learning and using what is learned. Although all successful second language learning depends on usage to some extent, when the aim of a program is to revive a faltering language, usage becomes critical. The challenge is to ensure that in school settings learners encounter meaningful communication in the target language. But as a small and threatened language declines, the opportunities for use decline, too; the range of what it is possible to do and say in the language are depleted. National surveys in Ireland consistently show that the majority of Irish citizens strongly endorse the survival or Irish as a symbol of the country’s identity and history and for its transmission to younger generations. They also support its use in schooling but don’t tend to be optimistic about the likely success of these endeavours. While doing all this, they tend to use English in their daily lives for most if not all interaction. High levels of ability in the language link to higher rates of use, and higher rates of use are linked to having learned the language in serious immersion programs in school.

In 1997 the British government devolved responsibility for many areas of government to regional parliaments, especially in Scotland. During this time, I observed the process of bringing the languages of Scotland—Scots and Scottish Gaelic—into public policy and discourse (Lo Bianco, 2001). It is interesting to compare the fate of three policy documents in 1999–2000, all vying for attention. One, the Mulgrew report, *Citizens of a Multilingual World*, aimed to boost foreign and second language study. It was politely ignored, though some minor programs were taken up. A second, the MacPherson report, *Revitalising Gaelic a National Asset*, used a rhetoric of revitalising a unique national asset and a strong discourse of enrichment, language revival, and language rights, but it was buried under more committees, more investigation, more reporting, more delays. The third, the Moser report, *Improving Literacy and Numeracy*, located itself firmly within the discourse of economic restructuring, preparing people for jobs, and gaining key skills. It received major funding and support.

These three, coming so close to each other and being prepared for a new state, or rather a new national state that was recovering an ancient national state, dramatically expose how
national states think about issues of language. Here we see what I identified earlier, the pragmatic, monolingualism-oriented approach of national states.

Fishman, (2001) argues that reversing language loss is particularly difficult because language loss is a late order indicator of cultural loss, and by the time it is identified as being in crisis, a rival identity has been established and naturalised by the speaker community. This is clearly so in both the Scottish and Irish cases. Fishman also points out that language maintenance is positioned in competition with the replacing language which usually has greater economic opportunity and social mobility and so the indigenous or immigrant minority language can be seen as parochial or anti-modern or ageist in that it seeks to support the interests of older generations rather than the young, or as atavistic, nostalgic, that is, as backward looking. Fishman contends that stable maintenance of minority languages both requires and produces social and institutional differentiation and that this differentiation is problematic because it defies the ethos of participation and social cohesion that many societies, like Australia’s, value. Minority language functions require constant reinforcement; schools are institutions of nation, state, and economy and it is therefore hard to turn schools to support in a sustained way the interests of minority populations.

In light of these thoughts, I think we can see two broad approaches to keeping language diversity alive. I want to call these the sociological and the ecological.

The sociological approach targets the socioeconomic context and deals with the problem of finding material rewards for language maintenance. People who hold this view are often quite sceptical about the possibility of reversing language shift through linguistics-based language planning. A key tool is the GIDS framework development by Fishman, which plots the health of a language according to the social domains in which it is present. The main actors who take this kind of approach are community development officers, political activists, employment and entrepreneurial interests but also language professionals.

The ecological approach targets communication rather than economics and society, and looks at language learning and symbolism. In this approach, practitioners are often quite optimistic about reversing language shift and sceptical about focusing only or mostly on the context of material rewards. A key tool is to link biological-linguistic diversity and argue that language diversity enhances biological diversity and is in everyone’s interest. The main actors who take this approach are language professionals, such as teachers, language planners, anthropologists, and community representatives.

KEEPING LANGUAGE DIVERSITY ALIVE

Today we have inherited the historical legacy of major language loss. The Red Book might strike some readers as alarmist and cataclysmic but the erosion of languages is real, subtractive bilingualism is common, and we have considerable work to do to bolster existing communities of minority languages even as we promote the learning and use of languages of wider communication. Additive bilingualism is both possible and highly
desirable. As I noted earlier, the three kinds of activity that are required to improve our prospects for making more languages intergenerationally vital are ideological work, social work, and linguistic work.

Ideological work is directed at undoing past policy. Past policy need not be explicitly negative policy, but the ensemble of practices and policies that have relegated once vital communities to vulnerability in national states may under conditions of globalisation offer new prospects for openness and possibility. Essentially the ideological work in language planning for language diversity is to contest the negatives from the replacing languages, negatives related to the value and vitality of indigenous and immigrant languages.

The social work relates to making more vital local intrafamily and intracommunity use-functions for threatened languages, that is, finding new spaces in community and family lives. Revitalising processes of intimacy in traditional languages so that home transmission can be more successful is a critical aspect of the work that needs doing to strengthen communities and strengthen their languages.

The linguistic, or rather sociolinguistic work, involves re-establishing intact discourses, that is, long turns for threatened languages and naturalising communication in minority languages, even if this means persisting against the discouraging effects of code-switching and limited initial expressive abilities.

These three kinds of work reflect the Irish experience of the links between attitudes, ability, and use and reinforce what appears to work, what has worked, successfully in language revitalisation efforts in different parts of the world. These efforts, it should be said, combine insights from both sociological and ecological approaches. The ideology is centred on contesting negative constructions, both from outsiders and from insiders. Often this involves accepting widened communicative possibilities provided by languages of wider communication, that is, aiming for language maintenance with bilingualism.

Transmission of language within intimate relations of the home can be a critical dimension of language maintenance and recovery, if it is possible to preserve or recover a role for the endangered language in primary language socialisation. It has often been found that it is important to provide some material rewards for the endangered language; including it as a means of instruction in formal transmission, that is, secondary language socialisation, especially through literacy is one way but not the only one.

In 1997 in the Philippines, the national government enacted the Indigenous People’s Rights Act (IPRA) requiring corporations to actively seek and obtain the consent of villagers to development initiatives rather than merely having such bodies explain their intentions to locals. The IPRA raises the role of local indigenous languages in relation to development issues because it obligates the state to a range of cultural, educational, social, and linguistic procedures and entitlements for indigenous populations, including an acceptance of the legal standing of documents in these languages.
It is important to aim at producing intact discourses, separate domains, a kind of distinctive life for the indigenous, immigrant, or otherwise endangered minority language. Establishing a kind of distinctive life for the endangered minority language aims to forge links between learning and usage thereby overcoming one of the failures of many past revival efforts that have focused too strongly on formal education alone.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that while bilingualism itself is in fact growing rapidly in the world, some kinds of bilingualism and language diversity as they pertain to small, minority, indigenous, and immigrant languages are far from secure, and many are in deep and imminent danger of extinction. The effort to reverse these kinds of language shift focus attention on our human social relations, identities, and behaviours that are usually taken for granted and left unexamined. These efforts are justified both because the peoples they affect are often struggling against the imposition of alien lifestyles, behaviours, and circumstances, and because the result of interacting multilingual communication widens human imaginative, intellectual, and cultural possibilities.
REFERENCES


Approaches to TESL have had an ambivalent, often overtly hostile relationship toward students’ first languages. The result has been, all too often, that students’ first languages have been constructed as obstacles to learning and specifically devalued or excluded from the teaching and learning process. This paper argues that the pedagogical grounds for such an approach are weak and spurious and are more the product of an overarching, often unquestioned ideology of English monolingualism. In contrast, the paper explores what rights might or should be attributable to English language learners in relation to their first languages, the role(s) first languages might play in ESL classrooms, and the ethical responsibilities we have as ESL teachers to foster linguistic diversity while still discharging our primary pedagogical task of teaching English.

The question I want to focus on in this paper today is whether we should as ESL teachers actively foster the first languages of our bilingual students in the ESL classroom. And, if the answer is yes—as I will argue it is—how we might actually go about doing so, while not compromising our principal pedagogical task of teaching English.

Before turning specifically to what bilingual students have to offer us in the classroom, let me take a different example of linguistic expertise that many students bring with them currently to the classroom—text messaging. What is most striking in discussions of text messaging, at least in the public domain, and among adults, is that this phenomenon is almost always constructed negatively. It seems that text messaging is responsible for all manner of linguistic sins, not the least of which is contributing directly to an apparent decline in literacy standards (if not, civilisation as we know it!). What do these discussions tell us, aside from a tendency towards moral panic in discussions of literacy? Four key things:

1. Text-messaging is actually a highly specific (and sophisticated) language register, requiring significant knowledge of, and expertise in, its use.
2. It is used by a relatively powerless/low status group (young people).
3. It is consistently derided by powerful gatekeepers (adult/teachers) as having no value and/or being actively disadvantageous (and this derision, by implication, is often extended to the speakers/users themselves).
4. This derision/dismissal is also a consequence of the aforementioned gatekeepers’ lack of knowledge of how to use it, their consequent failure to understand its nuances (complexity) and, for both reasons, their more general unwillingness or inability to learn it.
Given this digression, what exactly is my point? Simply, that this is also how the majority of ESL teachers—many of whom are themselves monolingual speakers of English—treat the language skills and repertoires that bilingual students bring to class with them. That is, where they recognise these language repertoires at all, they construct them as problematic, or as deficits, instead of recognising, valuing, and using them as linguistic resources in the teaching and learning process. Given this, how might we adopt a more positive view of the linguistic competence, or more accurately, competencies of our bilingual students in our classrooms?

RECOGNISING COMPETENCIES

How do we normally categorise the competencies of our bilingual students in TESL contexts (both school-based and adult education)? Almost always, by their relationship to, knowledge of, and/or ability in English, that is, solely as second language (L2) English learners. In other words, we categorise them by their L2 English language competence, at any given point in time, and compare this competence, most often explicitly, with that of a native English speaker. Not surprisingly, the comparison is seldom favourable and so we end up consistently judging these students by what they lack, rather than the many other language competencies that they might actually bring to the teaching and learning process.

David Block (2003), in his excellent book, The Social Turn in Second Language Acquisition, describes this tendency as part of what he calls a wider monolingual bias that pervades much of English second language learning and teaching. We can see this monolingual bias, Block argues, in the very use of the term second (as in ESL, TESL, SLA) to describe the language acquisition processes of bilingual students.

Why might this be problematic? For a start, because it presupposes a view of language learning that is perhaps most familiar to (and therefore often limited to) monolingual (English) speakers themselves. How exactly? It presumes that one’s first language (or L1) is distinct, unitary, and (most often) singular, that is, we have only one, clearly defined, first language that we learnt as a child and, if we ever bother to learn another language, we do this subsequently, usually in school—hence, L2. However, this clearly defined, separable, and sequential process of learning languages is precisely not the norm for many bilingual speakers, who may well be exposed to a number of languages from birth (thus learning them simultaneously), may use these in complex, complementary, and sometimes overlapping ways, and may thus be well beyond the appellation second language when they come to learning English.¹

If you are not quite convinced yet, here are some further examples of this monolingual bias, and a closely related negative view of bilingualism, in TESL and SLA research and practice. Take the phrase language interference, which inevitably presupposes that knowledge of other

¹ And yet this multilingualism is something that is seldom acknowledged, even in the research literature, and explains why the term bilingual continues to be used to also describe those who are multilingual. I will reluctantly continue to do this as well in the rest of this paper, for the sake of brevity, and following the accepted convention, but we should bear in mind that the term bilingual often means much more than that.
languages specifically delimits or debilitates knowledge and use of the language being learned (this is most trenchantly evident in CELTA teaching approaches, for example).

We also see this view quite clearly represented in the often highly negative construction of codeswitching by bilingual speakers, a construction usually espoused by monolingual speakers who have no experience of it themselves. Consequently, it is taken by many people (ESL teachers among them) to be a sign of linguistic deficit, or lack of mastery of the languages being used. While one function of codeswitching is clearly to compensate for a particular lack of knowledge at any given time in the language being learned, it is also much more than this. Indeed, codeswitching is a highly sophisticated linguistic tool, and one that almost all proficient bilinguals use instinctively. It can be used to emphasize a particular point, clarify a point, reinforce a request, substitute a word, and/or express a concept that does not have direct equivalence in the other language. It can also be used for wider sociolinguistic reasons: indicating solidarity, humour, signalling a change of attitude or relationship, and/or including or excluding someone from the conversation.

A similar deficit approach can often be regularly seen in relation to the construction of learner errors (although Stephen Pit Corder, who introduced the term in the late 1960s, actually stressed that so-called learner errors shouldn’t be regarded as simple mistakes, or examples of incomplete learning, but rather as proof of both the systematic and developmental nature of linguistic competence for learners acquiring another language).

Even the more neutral term interlanguage still presupposes what can be described as a “mastery continuum,” with the aim of acquiring complete linguistic competence, or native-like competence, in the target language (comparable to that of a native speaker), English in our context, while describing the states of (in)competence in between.

All these terms then have the potential to construct the bilingualism/multilingualism of our students as problematic, and often, in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, actually end up doing so. The term non-English-speaking background (NESB) is itself a classic example of this, and why the phrases English as an additional language (EAL) or English language learner (ELL) have been increasingly used in recent years instead.

Consequently, bilinguals are judged by what they have not achieved (native-like competence in an L2) rather than what they already have: an extensive, often highly complex and sophisticated repertoire of language competencies. And, moreover, it is a repertoire that is generally more extensive than that of a monolingual speaker (of which more in a moment). So, rather than continuing to describe or construct bilingual students in terms of language incompetence then, it is much more accurate (and fair) to describe them as multicompetent, a term that I have borrowed directly from the work of Vivian Cook and David Block.

Furthermore, research on bilingualism over the last 40 years has demonstrated that bilinguals consistently exhibit this kind of multicompetence in a range of key language tasks, regularly outperforming monolinguals in doing so (see Bialystok, 2001a, 2001b, for useful reviews). Let me briefly describe three key areas where bilinguals exhibit multicompetence.
1. Cognitive Flexibility

One aspect of cognition that has shown a positive relationship with bilingualism is **divergent thinking**. Measures of divergent thinking provide subjects with a starting point for thought and ask them to generate a whole series of permissible solutions, for example, “Think of a paper clip and tell me all the things you could do with it.” It has been suggested by some as an index of creativity, while others simply view it as a distinctive cognitive style, reflecting a rich imagination and an ability to scan rapidly a diverse range of possible solutions. In contrast, **convergent thinking** is measured by tests that provide a number of pieces of information that the subject must synthesize to arrive at the correct answer; the information is provided to converge on a particular solution.

Research has found that bilinguals are consistently superior to monolinguals on divergent thinking tests (see Ricciardelli, 1992 for a useful review). Surprisingly, perhaps, bilinguals are also consistently better at convergent thinking. They are more able to generate a number of different hypothesises in order to reach a solution (and use more complex language in so doing). They also draw more extensively on the use of metaphors (Kessler & Quinn, 1987).

2. Metalinguistic Awareness

Bilinguals are often better at convergent and divergent thinking because of the second dimension in which they consistently outperform monolingual speakers: **metalinguistic awareness** (MA). MA is the ability to analyse language, particularly language forms, how they work, and how they are integrated into the wider language system. MA is, in effect, knowledge about language, and it can be demonstrated at various different levels: **phonological awareness** (the understanding of sound units), **word awareness**, and **syntactic awareness**.

At the level of word awareness, bilinguals are more able to differentiate between the form and meaning of words. For example, in an experiment conducted on bilingual and monolingual students in South Africa, aged between 4 and 9 years, the researcher (Ianco-Worrall, 1972) asked the following question: “I have three words: cap, can and hat. Which is more like cap, can or hat?” If a child chose can, it suggested that the choice was governed by word sound; if hat was chosen, the choice was likely to have been based on word meaning. The results showed little difference between the monolingual and bilinguals groups, when aged between 7 and 9 years of age (both responded by choosing word meaning). Differences were significant, however, with children aged between 4 and 6 years. Bilinguals tended to respond to meaning, monolinguals to word sound.

As a result, the research concluded that bilinguals “reach a stage of semantic [meaning] development, as measured by our test some 2–3 years earlier than their (monolingual) peers” (Ianco-Worrall, 1972, p. 1398). These conclusions have since been widely replicated in other studies. Similarly, at the level of syntactic (i.e., grammatical) awareness, bilinguals are also consistently more able to judge the grammatical acceptability, or otherwise, of a sentence in a given language (for further discussion, see May, Hill, & Tiakiwai, 2004).
This enhanced MA in bilinguals should not, in fact, really surprise us, since bilinguals, by definition, are working with more than one language simultaneously and thus need to have a greater awareness of how they each work and how they are both similar and, crucially, different. Working with more than one language simultaneously in turn requires closer monitoring and inspection of the languages concerned and might well explain the greater awareness and more intensive analytical ability towards language demonstrated by bilingual children, particularly in their attempts to keep the two languages apart. As Ben-Zeev (1977a) has observed, this “forces the child to develop particular coping strategies which in some way accelerate cognitive development” (p. 1009; see also 1977b).

3. Communicative Sensitivity

Another key area of difference in which bilinguals outperform monolinguals is that of communicative sensitivity. In this respect, bilinguals need to be aware of which language to speak in which situation. They need constantly to monitor the appropriate language in which to respond or in which to initiate a conversation. They also have to pick up clues and cues about when to switch languages. The research literature suggests that this need to monitor language may give a bilingual increased sensitivity to the social nature and communicative functions of language. Bilinguals, for example, are generally more sensitive to feedback cues. Other research findings imply that bilingual children may also be more aware of the needs of the listener.

So, in short, research on bilingualism—now amounting to more than 150 major studies since the 1960s—has consistently found cognitive advantages for bilinguals over monolinguals in these key areas, findings which correlate closely with a view of bilingual students as multicompetent. What are the implications of these findings for ESL teachers? And what are some possible responses. For example:

- How can we challenge, rather than contribute to, the deficit construction of bilingual students in our classrooms?
- How can we recognise more effectively the rich language competencies they bring to the classroom rather than simply what they may lack in English?
- Or more pragmatically, what will you do when you next hear a teacher describing a bilingual student as “having no language”? Will you point out, for example, that however limited their grasp of English is at that particular point in time, it is still highly likely to be considerably more advanced than that teacher’s grasp of the student’s first language?

And more generally, if you don’t already know, what can or will you do to learn more about bilingualism itself? (And I don’t mean here the need to learn the actual languages of every student in your classroom.) For one thing, you could access key texts that discuss and address bilingualism and bilingual learning directly (see, e.g., Baker, 2006; Baker & Prys Jones, 1998; Corson 2000; Cummins 2000; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; May et al., 2004). There are also a number of highly useful Web sites that focus specifically on how to teach bilingual students effectively; see, for example, the Web site for Language Enhancing the Achievement of Pasifika (LEAP; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2003).
FOSTERING ADDITIVE BILINGUAL CONTEXTS

So, that’s the first key issue that I want to highlight in this paper: the need for us as ESL teachers to consciously adopt a view of bilingual students as multicompetent, recognising the richness and complexity of their language repertoires and the cognitive advantages associated with them. But this immediately raises another key question: If bilingual students are so multicompetent, why do they often do so poorly in school? Why are they often in the lowest echelons of academic achievement?

In New Zealand, for example, there has been increasing concern over the last decade about our so-called literacy tail and the disproportionate number of Maori, Pasifika, and ELL students who are situated within it. In fact, for some time now, various international literacy surveys (IEA, PISA, PIRLS) have consistently highlighted that although New Zealand’s top-performing students in literacy do extremely well in relation to international standards, the gap between them and the poorest performing students also remains one of the largest of any country in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). That is, New Zealand has the highest gap in achievement in the OECD between those students for whom the language of the school is also the language of the home (English, in New Zealand’s case) and those for whom it is not (Wilkinson, 1998). I would hazard a guess that achievement patterns in Australia for comparable students might not be altogether that different.

For many years, this literacy tail has been explained (or rather, explained away) in New Zealand by laying the blame squarely on the students—most notably, on their bilingualism and/or their cultural or family practices. In other words, the problem lies with the learners, their culture and language, and/or their approach to teaching and learning. It does not, it seems, lie with the system of schooling they experience.

But the multicompetent view of bilingualism and bilingual students that I have already discussed clearly contradicts this notion, and also, interestingly, provides a pointer to where the real answers lie. Because there is a crucial caveat that I have not yet mentioned with respect to the research findings on bilingualism: The cognitive, educational, and social advantages associated with bilingualism are most evident in learning and teaching contexts that specifically recognise, value, and use that bilingualism in the learning and teaching process. These are described in the literature as additive bilingual contexts.

In contrast, learning and teaching contexts that exclude the bilingualism of the learner and/or specifically ignore, devalue, and exclude students’ bilingualism—described as subtractive bilingual contexts—tend to atrophy the bilingualism of students over time and are also considerably less effective in achieving successful educational outcomes for such students.

Why are additive bilingual contexts so important to both the language development and the educational success of bilingual students and subtractive context so deleterious to both? For the following reasons:

- Building on interdependence
- Accounting for the second language learning delay
Recognising academic English as a specific language register

Let me look at each of these in turn.

**The Interdependence Principle**

Jim Cummins’ work (1979a, 1979b, 1984, 1996, 2000) on the significance of the (developmental) interdependence principle to first and second language learning is by now widely known but, at the risk of rehearsing it yet again, let me just summarise it briefly. Cummins has argued that a child’s second language (L2) competence is significantly dependent on the level of competence already achieved in the first language (L1). Or to put it another way, the more developed the child’s L1, the easier it will be for the child to develop the L2. The less developed the L1, the more difficult the achievement of bilingualism and biliteracy (the latter of which is also crucial to academic achievement) will be.

The former is most apparent in bilingual education contexts—which draw explicitly and extensively on the L1 of students in the teaching and learning process—most obviously through its use as a medium of instruction. The latter is most evident in English-only medium contexts, and limited forms of ESL provision, such as ESL withdrawal or pull-out programs, which generally preclude use of students’ L1.

Most importantly, the interdependence principle specifically repudiates the commonsense time-on-task theory, which is premised on the notion that maximum exposure in the L2 is required for successful language acquisition and learning to occur. Consequently, it is felt that instruction in L1 (for minorities whose L1 is not English) lowers or impedes the levels of English proficiency that such students might acquire.

However, as with many so-calledcommonsense solutions, this view is simply wrong, not least because it violates a key pedagogical principle that we should always move students from the known to the unknown or rather, that we should always, where we can, acknowledge students’ prior knowledge in the learning and teaching process. We do this in every other area of teaching and learning, so why not in language teaching?

**The Second Language Learning Delay**

One other reason why the time-on-task theory doesn’t work relates to another key finding from Cummins’ work: that it normally takes approximately 2 years for a child to develop conversational ability or surface fluency in an L2, yet between 5 to 8 years for a child to develop the more evolved academic skills required to cope with classroom language and curriculum content. As Cummins and others have shown, children can have highly developed conversational skills in, for example, English, yet may still perform badly in school if their academic language skills remain underdeveloped.

This distinction has become immortalised in the terms *BICS* (basic interpersonal communication skills) and *CALP* (cognitive academic language proficiency), first introduced by Cummins in the late 1970s, although the terms *conversational competence* and *academic language proficiency*
are now the currently accepted terms. Conversational competence and academic language proficiency describe two distinct language registers that students have to master in an L2 (or in an L1, for that matter) in order to succeed academically.

**Conversational competence** relates to the phonological, syntactic, and lexical skills necessary to function in everyday interpersonal contexts. The requirements for conversational competence are usually cognitively undemanding and contextually supported (e.g., with paralinguistic cues such as gesture) and, as such, children, as Cummins found, are likely to acquire this kind of competence in an L2 within 1 to 2 years.

**Academic language proficiency,** in contrast, requires children to manipulate or reflect on the surface features of language outside immediate interpersonal contexts. These requirements are most apparent in contextually reduced, or disembedded, academic situations where higher order thinking skills are required, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Moreover, Cummins argues that these skills are a necessary prerequisite for the successful acquisition of literacy skills at school because they involve the ability to use language as an instrument of thought in problem solving (see also Corson, 1995, 1997, 2000). This is why it takes longer, most often 5 to 8 years, for children to acquire academic language proficiency in an L2 (Cummins, 2000; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000). This developmental lag, termed the **second language learning delay,** is further compounded by the fact that children have to master the academic language register of the L2 at the same time as having to learn new curricular information in that language.

**Explicit Language Teaching**

This, in turn, suggests the third key principle: that it is the task of the teacher to make explicit the specific language register that is academic English, its rules and conventions, and how it is similar to and, crucially, different, from the languages and language registers the students already use. It is not enough to just spend time on teaching English (time on task), we need to teach it positively and strategically and in specific relation to students’ existing language repertoires (thus allowing us to bridge or scaffold students’ learning from one to the other; see Gibbons, 2002).

**Combining the Principles: Educational Implications**

When these three key principles are positively addressed, we have **additive bilingual contexts,** where students’ bilingualism is maintained, biliteracy can develop, and the educational success of bilingual students (which is crucially linked to the successful development of biliteracy) thus increases. When these three principles are ignored, we have **subtractive bilingual contexts,** where students’ bilingualism atrophies, biliteracy (and even just literacy in English) does not necessarily ensue, and students’ educational success withers. It is these latter subtractive contexts—still widely evident in our schools and ESL programs—that explain the poor educational achievement of bilingual students over time compared with additive bilingual contexts.

These patterns or trends have been demonstrated repeatedly in major longitudinal studies of bilingual student achievement, most prominently in the United States (Genesee, Lindholm-
Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Ramirez, 1992; Ramirez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991; Thomas & Collier 1997, 2002). What these studies consistently and clearly show is that subtractive bilingual contexts, particularly English-only classroom environments, are the least effective in successfully educating bilingual students over time. Moreover, the educational success of bilingual students improves over time in direct relation to the degree that the students’ L1 is used in the teaching and learning process.

The key issue in relation to these findings is the phrase over time. All literacy and language intervention programs will make a difference to student achievement in the short term. But this achievement will not necessarily be sustained throughout the course of schooling. What these studies demonstrate unequivocally is that the most successful programs for bilingual students over time are those that incorporate the students’ L1 in the teaching and learning process. This is because, as I discussed earlier, it allows us to draw on our students’ prior linguistic competences, as well as providing them, via the interdependence principle, with the best basis for learning an L2.

Interestingly, these studies also highlight a key policy issue in TESL, which bears closer consideration: the relative effectiveness of integrated versus ESL withdrawal programs. The research shows that integrated approaches to ESL—in-classroom support with bilingual assistants e.g., as has been promoted in recent years in Britain—are demonstrably more effective than ESL withdrawal or pull-out programs. Why is this? Because ESL withdrawal programs fail to link content and language learning directly, a key requirement for the successful acquisition of academic English for bilingual students (see below). ESL withdrawal options also fail to utilise the L1 of bilingual students to any great extent and, anyway, students are not in such programs long enough to account effectively for the second language learning delay. Compounding this problem is that withdrawal programs, by definition, remove students from the classroom language environment, thus also removing them from the richest language resource that these students have available to them in learning academic, classroom-based English. As Clegg (1996) observes of this: “Why go to the trouble of artificially recreating the mainstream classroom [in withdrawal classes] when the real thing is available next door?” (p. 10; for further discussion, see Gibbons, 2002). The fact then that withdrawal programs often remain the default policy response for bilingual students in mainstream schools—this is certainly still the case in New Zealand, for example—should provide us with serious pause for thought.

These findings thus require us to consider the following in our own approaches to teaching and learning:

1. How can we build on the existing language and literacy skills of our students (fostering language interdependence)?
2. How can we provide learners with a wider repertoire of language competencies, especially in relation to academic English?
3. How can we address the second language learning delay (teaching academic English as a specific language register, scaffolding, task-based instruction)?
PEDAGOGICAL RESPONSES

In this final section, let me look at some possible ways that we can address these questions in overtly ESL classroom contexts.

To begin with, as I have consistently argued, we need to acknowledge, include, and draw upon the existing language competencies of our students. Accordingly, as teachers, we need to be aware of (to the degree possible) the language backgrounds and practices of students. And if we are not aware, as may well be the case with a wide range of students in any given class, we need to look to way of providing students with opportunities to make these language conventions explicit.

These opportunities can be created by fostering the use of L1 in class—not only as a means to facilitate understanding, particularly at higher cognitive levels (cf. interdependence; working from the stronger language), but also as an explicit means of comparing and contrasting language patterns. Making language patterns explicit can also be accomplished in a variety of ways: by encouraging or requiring students to observe, interview, report on, and/or record their language habits and conventions and how these might differ from English. (This activity also, in turn, fosters the metalinguistic awareness of students).

This approach also addresses/redresses another problematic feature of our classrooms, which is a point I have continually tried to reiterate, that we make far too little use of students’ own language(s), especially their informal and expressive talk and writing, as a learning resource in the classroom (and this includes L1 English language speakers as well).

We also need to apprentice students much more explicitly into the particular language conventions that structure academic, classroom-based discourse, particularly because this is a discourse, or language register, that not all students have equal access to, or prior knowledge of. Nor are its language conventions equally congruent with students’ existing language (and cultural) practices. So, it is our responsibility as teachers to make the connections explicit; it is not the responsibility of students to somehow join the dots themselves.

This requires making these key classroom-based language conventions transparent, as well as modifying those that militate against effective teaching and learning. A key example here is the principal exchange pattern used in “mainstream” Western classrooms—and extensively in L2 English classrooms as well—a pattern first described by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) as the initiation, response, evaluation (IRE) pattern.

What is striking about this pattern is how little opportunity there is for students to actually engage in meaningful, extended discourse (often the teacher just wants brief confirmation of what the students knows). Students are simply required (very briefly) to display their knowledge; there is very little actual opportunity for exploratory talk, one of the key means through which language learners can explore and clarify concepts (via questioning, hypothesising, deducing, and responding to others’ ideas).
What is also striking about IRE as a particular discourse strategy is its cultural specificity. It is a particular discourse strategy that is rooted squarely in Western epistemology (and, as it happens, white, Western middle-class discourse norms). Most notably, it requires public, individual, and verbal responses, processes of displaying knowledge which do not always sit easily or well with other culturally located ways of teaching and learning (e.g., compare the quite different cultural discourse patterns of Australian Aboriginal peoples).

An effective means to address both the structural and cultural limitations of IRE then is to delimit the directional/evaluative dimension of the exchange, which effectively closes discussion down. Consequently, a variation termed the initiation, response, feedback (IRF) model has been developed, where more open-ended feedback is substituted for evaluation, providing students with the opportunity to continue to practise and use language in appropriate academic language contexts.

An even better approach is to delimit the dominating influence of the teacher more widely, via the use of group work within classrooms. Group work has many advantages:

- It allows learners to work with and learn from each other.
- As student interaction increases, so too does the opportunity for language use, particularly the exploratory talk that is so important to language (and cognitive) learning.
- This exploratory talk can include students’ L1 as well as English (e.g., students may initially discuss, read, or write in their L1 and then discuss or report back in English).
- Group work is also often more culturally congruent for minority groups students and has strong affective as well as cognitive/learning advantages (cf. communicative competence).
- This language use is also contextualised in relation to meaningful, task-based learning activities, integrating language and content learning (see Gibbons, 2002, for further discussion).

This final point about integrating language and content in our instructional practices was also a key indicator that was highlighted in the research on effective teaching and learning approaches for bilingual students, discussed earlier.

Indeed, TESL research (although not yet policy and practice) is increasingly acknowledging that an integrated approach to language and content is the most effective learning and teaching approach. This is because, as Gibbons (2002) summarises it:

- Language is best learned through its meaningful use in appropriate contexts.
- The integration of language and content more effectively addresses the second language learning delay.
- Situating language teaching within a curriculum area has the potential to support both (via continuous recycling of concepts, grammar, and vocabulary associated with particular curriculum knowledge).
- In contrast, nonintegrated approaches are insufficient to enable students to succeed in mainstream studies.
- It allows all students to experience (and benefit from) a classroom that is culturally and linguistically diverse (pp. 119–120).
CONCLUSION

And all these aspects also highlight, if we need reminding, that the distinction between ESL and “mainstream” classrooms is increasingly meaningless, since the linguistic and cultural diversity apparent in our classrooms right now tells us that bilingual students are the mainstream.

If we are to keep the language diversity of these classrooms alive, rather than ignore and/or sublimate the multiple voices of our bilingual students, as we have tended to do up until now, we need most of all—and especially as ESL teachers—to realise that learning English is not a zero sum game. That students can maintain their languages as well as learn English. That this is their right (just as we presume the right to speak English, if it is our first language). That this is our ethical responsibility as teachers—to value and foster the existing language competencies of our students. And that this is, anyway, the best way for these students to learn academic English and to achieve educationally over time.

As a profession and as individual teachers, we obviously all want the best for our bilingual students—to do the best by them. But, given the weight of research evidence that I have outlined for you today, it is also demonstrably clear that good intentions, on their own, are not enough.

The monolingual bias referred to by David Block continues to pervade many of our approaches to TESL. The negative impact of this bias on bilingual students—especially in relation to their long-term educational achievement, not to mention their bilingualism—is also inescapable. The need, therefore, to take a different approach, to adopt a more additive bilingual approach to our teaching and learning, is all the more pressing. After all, as Albert Einstein once famously remarked, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. I hope we can all rise to that challenge. At the very least, it is our ethical responsibility as teachers—in light of the research evidence—to try.
REFERENCES


Closing Remarks: A Summary of Key Points, From a Northern Territory Perspective

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I began my summing up by acknowledging Veronica Dobson’s welcome to her traditional Arrernte land in Alice Springs and with a few words in honour and memory of Dr. Marika, who had planned to be present at the symposium but who had passed away only a few weeks earlier.

I wanted to locate my story of the symposium on Arrernte land and foreground Veronica’s story about her Arrernte language preservation work. This was the topic of her talk. I also wanted to refer to ideas in a paper written by Dr Marika, which her family had agreed could be circulated to the symposium (Marika, 1999). To this I wanted to add some reflections on the international research of Joe lo Bianco and Stephen May.

Veronica Dobson

Veronica told two stories, the first was an unhappy one about working hard to develop early childhood traditional language support materials for young Arrernte Aboriginal children, which, for reasons Veronica did not make clear, have never been used. After years of preparation, the “rug was pulled out from under our feet,” and the materials are still sitting in the Yeperenye School, unable to be used. Alice Springs still has no language centre, the Institute for Aboriginal Development no longer has the language support structures it once had, and the Department of Education no longer gives strong support for language programs in schools.

Her second story was about a success. It involved work with young students in the Santa Teresa area, east of Alice Springs, also on Arrernte land. It started with a problem to do with water, a double problem really. About seven of the traditional water holes in the desert around Santa Teresa were being polluted by cattle. But these water holes are also a key part of the Arrernte creation stories, ceremony, and identity, and some of the young Arrernte people in the Santa Teresa area were growing up without knowing about them, where they are, where they came from, and who they belong to.

Even though Dr. Marika’s Rirratjiŋu clan country in northeast Arnhemland is thousands of kilometres away on the north coast of the Northern Territory (and there are many Aboriginal language groups to pass through between the Arrernte and the Rirratjiŋu lands), both the Arrernte and the Rirratjiŋu place water holes at the centre of their sacred traditions. In Dr. Marika’s paper, she refers to Milŋurr, the sacred spring water on her Rirratjiŋu clan land, which her father helped her understand as a metaphor associated with teaching and learning. “Water is often taken to represent knowledge in Yolŋu philosophy” (p. 112). This was the first point of contact between the two Aboriginal stories, one from the coast and one from the central desert.

Veronica told of her experience leading a party of school children, their teachers and some of their families to visit the ancient Arrernte water holes and hear the stories about them. They were
joined by people from the Northern Territory Conservation Commission, who worked with the rangers to identify and measure the feral cattle dung which had contaminated the waterholes and to clean them up and put fences around them to keep them pure. They were also joined by a scientist from the Australian Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) who was interested in capturing samples of the aquatic life in the water holes and taking them back to the lab to identify them.

Veronica helped to organise the trips; she taught the young people, discussed things with the other Arrernte old people, talked to the scientists, and helped everyone understand each other. So in her work of keeping Arrernte language alive, Veronica had identified two problems: the ancestral knowledge, and the polluted springs. And she was dealing with two knowledge traditions: the Arrernte and the scientific. But, and this is my first key point, she had only one pedagogy—it was an Arrernte pedagogy, a way of making knowledge together, which has been practised, as Veronica said, “since my people first walked on this country.” The knowledge-making process that Veronica described resonated strongly with the garma curriculum practice that the elders had given to Dr. Marika and her colleagues at the Yirrkala School, thousands of kilometres away on the far northeast coast of Australia’s Northern Territory more than 20 years earlier. Dr. Marika (1999) outlined this curriculum in her paper.

I recalled my own involvement with the curriculum practice when I was teacher-linguist at Yirrkala in the 1980s. I could picture what would have happened in Veronica’s project. The process would have started at a key place “on country,” in the presence of the elders, addressing a particular issue which the elders had identified as an one explore and around which to do knowledge work. Key people of all ages were brought together. Some of the younger children would be running around not paying much attention, some of the young adults would be standing shyly aside, listening intently, and the Year 7 and 8 school children—for whom the project was originally designed—would have been talking, listening, making notes, maybe drawing maps or pictures, and later helping with digging out the wells and putting up the fencing. The scientists would be talking to anyone who would listen. The children would have listened to Veronica talking English to the scientists and Arrernte to her own people and would have practised their own English, telling the scientist their own ideas and maybe asking questions. Then the Arrernte mob went back to the Santa Teresa School and worked together on making a record of the work they had been doing.

At the symposium, Veronica showed the big book which had been made from the project. It had photos of the water holes before and after they had been cleaned out, with text explaining the process, and lots of photos of children and Arrernte land care workers standing around with the scientists, and pictures of the microscopic marine life to which Veronica and the others had added Arrernte names.

In my summary, I briefly retold Veronica’s story with an emphasis on language and how it was used, and with one eye to Dr. Marika’s theory of Yolŋu pedagogy and to the two guest speakers’ reporting on the findings of international research. I turned then to look at some of the ideas Joe Lo Bianco had shared with us.
Joe Lo Bianco

Joe had started with a European history of language diversity. Long ago, before the world was broken up into nation states, there was language diversity everywhere. Monolingualism really only became widespread in Europe as the nation-state developed. People like the German philosopher Johann von Herder argued that languages and their traditions make up the ties that create a nation. And some of the French revolutionaries (commonly known as Jacobins), argued the same point in the opposite direction, wanting to stamp out French minority languages like Basque, Catalan, and Alsatian, in order to firm up the French national identity. Since then, and until recently, nation-state governments in most places have supported single languages for their people, and minority language speakers have struggled to avoid language shift, where a speech community shifts from their own traditional language to another, more dominant one.

Joe reported a small glimmer of hope for reducing language shift resulting from state nationalism. He talked about the postnational state, in which information and communication technologies, extreme mobility of people from place to place, multiple identities, and the politics of resistance all seem to be helping to keep language diversity alive.

I mentioned the collaborative research work with Dr. Marika’s people which we had been exploring at Charles Darwin University, following in her footsteps looking at distinctively Yolngu theories of knowledge. We have begun to work carefully with Aboriginal people who have begun to take up digital technologies for their own knowledge work in very remote places, using knowledge work “on country” as the means of keeping rare languages alive. The people we work with have voluntarily avoided using local government-funded knowledge centres and community councils for this work as if they could see something hegemonic at work in the state institutions set up to protect traditional culture. Instead, they are turning to internet sites like YouTube and other social-networking software to share their languages and culture with the world, in their own terms, on their own terms.

So what of schools? In all this, Joe remarked that the evidence is not very positive if we hope for schools to keep languages alive. He quoted Joshua Fishman, the famous sociologist of language, who said that “schools are unreliable allies of language maintenance, frequently and appreciably leading to language shift.” Joe also quoted Br Andrew Gonzales, a leading language theorist in the Philippines, who said that “benign neglect is better than deliberate language planning” in keeping minority languages alive. Joe gave the example of Irish language which has been compulsory for every Irish child in schools over the past 40 years, and Irish public servants have to pass exams in Irish language to get work. Yet the language has never thrived in the Irish community, because there aren’t viable places and purposes for it to be used outside of schools.

So thinking about Indigenous languages in Australia, Joe’s evidence seems to point to the fact that we can’t expect schools to be effective in keeping language diversity alive, nor can we expect English-only programs to lead inexorably to language death. English-only programs for Indigenous young people just lead to poor educational outcomes.

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Yet, given the questionable role of schools in preserving language diversity, we have already seen from the work of Veronica and Dr. Marika that there are things schools can do to aid in the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge practices (just as the Santa Teresa School supported the traditional pedagogy which Veronica brought in her work). And, as Stephen May pointed out, traditional Aboriginal language practices can help in the classroom teaching of English. Using the home language and culture in schools enables what Stephen called the “additive bilingual contexts” in the teaching of English. We shall turn to this in a moment.

Joe finished his talk by citing positive evidence from around the world of strategies which appear to work in reversing language shift. I tried to relate each of these international findings to ongoing work with Indigenous languages in the Northern Territory. The first is ideological work, contesting negative outsider constructions. Here, again, we recalled the work of Dr. Marika, who argued that the pedagogies based upon the philosophy of collaborative knowledge production of her Rirratjinu people were not only just as good, but in fact a lot better than traditional Western pedagogies. Western pedagogies, based upon a conduit metaphor of communication, which view knowledge as content rather than practice, do not necessarily teach respect for others people and the environment. They assume that knowledge is abstract and universal rather than located, invested, and owned. Aboriginal ecological knowledge and associated languages have strong advocates in the Northern Territory of Australia. We touched upon the widely accepted research finding that traditional aboriginal fire management strategies had allowed for the preservation of biodiversity in arid regions of central and northern Australia for many thousands of years, and noted that much of this biodiversity had diminished since the arrival of Europeans. The careful, situated, responsive ongoing “firestick farming” strategies employed by aboriginal people simply cannot be explained in a generalized, objectivised English. They are embedded in ancient social-religious practices which are kept alive through languages that have evolved separately and specifically in response to the needs and provisions of particular environments. Keeping the languages alive is part of keeping the biodiversity alive. We have ideological work to do.

The intimacy of primary language socialization was the second feature Joe cited as useful in reversing language shift. This sense of intimacy can be achieved in school settings, if we understand the value of keeping older family members involved in schooling. Dr. Marika’s cited examples where community elders were brought into the school to help develop curriculum philosophy and practice and to supervise the ways in which young people spoke of themselves in the course of their cultural studies. I recalled the practice in bilingual Navajo schools in Arizona where they fund grandmothers to sit at the back of each class, helping, talking, watching, encouraging, and telling stories. In the heydays of bilingual education in the Northern Territory in the 1970s and 80s, Aboriginal teachers had a central role to play in every classroom. In more recent years, many have been returned to their traditional role of “teaching assistants,” cleaning blackboards and sorting out problems of discipline and attendance. There is much which can be done, with little difficulty or expense, to restore the intimacy of Aboriginal language learning contexts to Aboriginal schools.

Identifying and ensuring material rewards for the use of minority languages are, according to Joe’s analysis, a third way to reduce language shift. Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory are already making good money from their art and music, and are keen to make a living from sharing their languages and culture. I was reluctant to ask Veronica whether she and the other
elders had been paid properly by the water scientists she had told us about. But advocating for the significance of one’s language in the scientific understanding of the environment is the first step to being properly recognised and remunerated for contributions to cross-cultural collaborations in scientific work. Until very recently, the Northern Territory scientific community has not been very successful in either identifying the scientific value of traditional ecological knowledge or in treating its exponents with dignity, respect, and fair remuneration. However, they are increasingly using traditional knowledge in their work.

Joe’s final pointer to reversing language shift related to the links between language and particular cultural learning contexts. When language is critical to doing something important and doing it well, then these intact discourses, with their separate, distinctive domains, contribute to the survival of language diversity. Veronica’s water project is a good example. When she introduced herself in the session after lunch, she said that she was devoted to two things: language teaching and land management. In a sense, they are inseparable; each one depends upon the other. “Without their land and their language, the kids don’t know who they are.” The importance of letting young people listen to and share in ancestral languages before they are expected to speak them strongly as young adults was also emphasised by Dr. Marika (1999), who in her article said she spent several years, starting in 1976, transcribing and translating recorded ancestral stories in her language but “didn’t realise it was so powerful until the 1980s” (p. 109). Working on a book of her ancestral song and land “gave me a fresh understanding of the world from a Yolŋu perspective . . . was like formal Yolŋu education . . . thinking about the complexities of the content and context of the Yolŋu world views.” She found this can happen “through demonstrating yourself in the public, in front of a critical audience” (p. 110). The way in which Yolŋu become truly themselves through performing their ancestral relations was key to the second of Dr. Marika’s articles which was circulated at the symposium (Marika-Mununggiritj & Christie, 1995).

Stephen May

Stephen May’s talk focussed more upon pedagogy. His key point was that first languages can and should play a crucial role in the teaching of English. His presentation revolved around three questions in relation to teachers using first languages in English teaching: Why don’t they? Why should they? and How can they?

Why don’t they? Basically in his view, because the vast majority of teachers of English as a second language are themselves monolingual English speakers. They don’t speak any other language, so they don’t have any insights into the richness of other language traditions and the particular and special ways these languages construe and reflect upon the world. Monolinguals undervalue others’ first languages. Because they have only one language in their head, they think of their (English) language and developing competency in it as “distinct, unitary and singular.” This idea leads them to believe, quite wrongly as the evidence shows, that there is only one way of viewing the world, and other (less advanced) languages might interfere with learning English. This leads to the commonsense but quite wrong time-on-task approach, which was essentially the theory used to justify the closure of bilingual programs in the Northern Territory: there’s only a certain amount of time in the school day, and only a certain amount of space in a child’s head, and the more time and space you spend on the Aboriginal youngsters’ own language, the less
time and space you have to fill it with good English. Stephen made clear that although this was certainly a commonsense approach, the research shows that it is quite wrong. Mother tongues are crucial in the academic development of young indigenous people.

The final part of Dr. Marika’s paper is devoted to asking why, in spite of a declared commitment to diversity, the education departments at the state and federal levels in Australia demand testing of English literacy for very young children in Aboriginal communities, who don’t speak any English at home or in their community. They claim that “no ethnic or cultural group should be privileged as the norm.” Yet the drive for national benchmarking of this sort comes from a simple uncritical acceptance of a commonsense—but entirely wrong—time-on-task theory of language learning.

Stephen’s argument as to why teachers should enlist first languages in the work of teaching English began with an interesting summary of extensive research pointing to the advantages of bilingualism. Bilinguals have been shown in research, for example, to display superior cognitive flexibility: They are better at both convergent and divergent thinking tasks. They also have more metalinguistic awareness. That is, they understand better how language works, how form relates to meaning, and how language is employed as a political tool. Because bilinguals have two or more ways of “doing” language, they have a heightened appreciation of how language and its relation to many social worlds is culturally contingent, rather than natural, singular, and universal.

I added another possible advantage of bilingualism emerging from our work with Dr. Marika: At least in the case of Australian Aboriginal languages, bilingualism offers a superior metaphysical awareness (beyond metalinguistic awareness). This is not to do with a meta-awareness of flexible way of doing language, but rather a meta-awareness of how language does the world. European languages in general assume an objective world, already out there, already structured, within a pre-existing space–time continuum. Aboriginal languages in my experience, don’t begin with an assumption that language “cuts nature at its joints,” but rather that language needs to be used carefully in good faith because of its creative potential in making new words possible. Languages make worlds. Ever since the Aboriginal ancestors first made the world knowable as they travelled across the lands and waters singing, dancing, talking, and crying, human being has been participating through language in that world-making work.

This, Dr. Marika would say, is as true of the creative worlds-making power of English speakers as it is of Yolŋu. It’s just that the Western knowledge tradition does its best to deny the metaphysics, which is part of all knowledge production. European education and its sciences claim that we are invested in a pre-existing structured world “out there” which we discover and name. Bilingual speakers of English and Aboriginal languages are more conscious of the politics of representation, the culturally and politically contingent ways in which truth claims are made, and the evidential practices that are brought to bear upon them. They assume, in an uncertain and emergent world where there is no a priori split between culture and nature, between language and reality. Distinguishing between good and bad faith is as critical to truth telling as is a theory that truth corresponds with an external reality.
In addressing Stephen’s final point, how can additive bilingual contexts be produced? I turned again to a quick summary of Veronica’s pedagogy. While Veronica was addressing herself to keeping Arrernte language and land alive and strong, she intimated some ways in which English was actually being used in her trips to country, the work on the water holes, the work with the scientists, and the subsequent classroom work at Santa Teresa. This context in which the students were learning English was what Stephen had called the “additive bilingual context,” where all the resources of Arrernte were being brought to the work of helping children and young people develop confidence in English. These students weren’t being withdrawn for specialist English classes. They were learning English in the context of learning their own languages, in the confidence of being on their own country with their own elders and knowledge authorities, working from their own knowledge base. “From the known to the unknown,” as Stephen put it, using and old adage that educators across the world once used widely. Code switching, which language teachers have traditionally abhorred, would have been frequent out there in the desert, flexible and productive and key to good, honest, cross-cultural knowledge exchange. And to keeping language diversity alive. Indigenous knowledge authorities—Aboriginal classroom teachers, education workers, teaching assistants, and so on—would be crucial in such an additive bilingual context.

Veronica had mentioned in her final comments something which might make the Australian Aboriginal case slightly different from others internationally. That is the crucial role of “country” as a holder of knowledge and of language. To paraphrase what she said in conclusion: Aboriginal knowledge is nothing without knowledge of country. Knowledge of country is nothing without knowledge of language. If those young people don’t have language, they won’t know who they are.

I concluded by thanking again the TESOL association, which has long been primarily concerned with teaching English across the world, for their wonderful initiative to fund a symposium on keeping minority language diversity alive, on Arrernte land, in Alice Springs, Australia.

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