Social Justice Through Multilingual Education

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Chapter 4

Designing Effective Schooling in Multilingual Contexts: Going Beyond Bilingual Models

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Some Limitations of Bilingual Models

In the field of bilingual education, a well recognised set of models – including submersion, immersion, transitional (early- and late-exit), two-way or dual medium and developmental maintenance – have allowed both researchers and practitioners to classify and discuss educational programmes according to the degree to which they develop each language, and to what end. These models, an outgrowth of an earlier highly detailed classification of 90 different bilingual schooling patterns by Mackey (1970), were solidified in the literature by Skutnabb-Kangas (1984), who made critical points not only about the pedagogical processes involved, but also about the ideological assumptions underlying them. From that point on, we could distinguish between transitional use of the mother tongue (to assimilate or transition to a dominant language) and true development and maintenance of both/all languages (to foster bi- or multilingualism). Another important distinction was made by Baker (2006) between weak programmes, which take a subtractive view of bilingualism and are based on the erroneous idea that the first language (L1) should be removed from the equation so that the second language (L2) can be learned, and strong programmes, which take an additive view more consistent with educational research findings, i.e. that the most effective language learning builds on L1 development.

This set of models has clearly been valuable as a practical and strategic tool, particularly in drawing attention to the hidden curriculum or underlying values inherent in choosing which languages are to be used in school and how. Classification of bilingual programmes has also allowed us to describe expected outcomes, combining research-based language learning principles with sociopsychological factors. We can demonstrate, for example, that monolingual dominant language policies and practices do not necessarily result in effective dominant language learning, nor do all so-called bilingual policies and practices promote bilingualism among learners.
Yet, despite the usefulness of the models, problems have arisen in their application in policy and practice internationally. The first problem is that some are not models at all, and some are not bilingual at all; for example, submersion is the lack of an approach that recognises learners’ own languages in the classroom, and immersion is often monolingual in a language that learners do not speak at home. Another problem is that any one model encompasses a wide range of approaches, practices and ideologies, making it difficult to generalise about how languages are being used or about the outcomes; for example, when determining the parameters for their large-scale longitudinal studies, Thomas and Collier (2002) were forced to define a range of approaches that could be included under each ‘model’, having realised that they could not rely on what schools happened to call their own programmes. Related to this is the problem that models developed to accomplish certain aims in one sociolinguistic context cannot necessarily be expected to accomplish the same aims in a different context. Finally, models address inputs and outputs but rarely the processes involved, and because they are oversimplifications, they ‘do not explain the successes or failures or the relative effectiveness of different types of bilingual education’ (Baker, 2006: 215).

An examination of educational language policy across countries and contexts reveals that such problems have led to misapplication of models, misinterpretation of their potential to achieve desired goals, and even misnaming of programmes for political ends. From a practical standpoint, there are still some nagging questions about the hidden messages inherent in the models adopted, as well as about how to operationalise models on a daily basis in the classroom.

I believe that these problems have arisen internationally because there has been too much of a focus on models and not enough attention paid to the language and learning principles underlying them. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to explore the limitations of classifying bi- or multilingual programmes according to bilingual models, using examples from multilingual Southern contexts. (I have adopted the geographically imprecise terms of North and South for ease in distinguishing between high-income and low-income countries in this analysis.) I will review the research-based thinking about languages and learning and discuss some of the challenges of applying them in real-life situations. Finally, I will propose a more comprehensive approach to designing effective educational programmes.

**Northern Models and Southern Realities**

While most of the models represent policy and practice in minority contexts in North America and Europe, during the past 20 to 30 years,
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some of them – overwhelmingly the weakest ones – have been discussed and applied extensively in the context of low-income Southern countries (see e.g. Dutcher, 1994, 2004; Heugh, 2006; Hornberger, 1991; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). This section describes the basic models that are most often discussed, including the form they may take in multilingual contexts.

Table 4.1 lists the most common models that will be discussed according to whether they are weak/strong and subtractive/additive, including their basic features such as which language(s) is used and the results that can be expected. Please note that while these models are intended for ‘bilinguals’, young learners have not necessarily been exposed to the dominant language prior to schooling, though they may be bi- or multilingual in local languages.

Submersion

As mentioned above, submersion is not a model of bilingual instruction at all, but exists because of either unintentional (laissez-faire) or intentional (assimilationist) policies, where speakers of non-dominant languages have no choice but to attend schools in languages they do not understand. If the policy is intentional, its only justification is the myth of ‘maximum exposure’, i.e. as much exposure as possible to the dominant language at the expense of the mother tongue. This myth has been thoroughly debunked (Cummins, 1999, 2000), but still persists in many parts of the world. Submersion, also known as ‘sink or swim’ (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1984), is a cruel form of schooling in both Northern and Southern contexts that forces children to try to make sense of a foreign medium of instruction while devaluing their languages, cultures, identities and overall self-esteem. In the North, it has been imposed on speakers of regional and minority languages as well as immigrant groups, resulting in disproportionately low educational results for learners from these groups.

Submersion in the South has been imposed on numerical majorities as well as minorities, even in places where no learners speak the school language and teachers themselves find it difficult. In African and Latin American contexts, it has its origins in colonial schooling for the local elite, which was then expanded to mass education without consideration for people’s learning needs. Throughout Asia, dominant languages have been given roles similar to colonial languages, which is why castellanización throughout Latin America – literally the ‘Spanishing’ of indigenous peoples (see e.g. Albó & Anaya, 2003) – has a parallel in places like Vietnam, where Khmer, J’rai and other ethnic minority groups are ‘Vietnamised’ through exposure to Vietnamese language and culture, beginning as early as possible through preschool education and boarding schools (Kosonen, 2004, 2005).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of programme</th>
<th>Type of learner</th>
<th>Medium of instruction</th>
<th>Educational aim (societal aim)</th>
<th>Most likely outcome (societal outcome)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monolingual (subtractive)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Submersion</td>
<td>Non-dominant language/culture</td>
<td>Dominant language</td>
<td>High L2 competence (assimilation to dominant language/culture)</td>
<td>Limited bilingualism, limited literacy (marginalisation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weak (subtractive)</td>
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<td>Transitional</td>
<td>Non-dominant language/culture</td>
<td>From non-dominant to dominant language</td>
<td>High L2 competence (assimilation to dominant language/culture)</td>
<td>Limited bilingualism, L1 literacy sustained or not sustained (possible integration)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong (additive)</td>
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<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>Non-dominant language/culture</td>
<td>Bilingual, initial focus on L1</td>
<td>Bilingualism/biliteracy (pluralism, enrichment)</td>
<td>Bilingualism/biliteracy (pluralism if change in dominant attitudes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immersion</td>
<td>Dominant language and culture</td>
<td>Monolingual; or bilingual with initial focus on L2</td>
<td>High L1 and L2 competence (pluralism, enrichment)</td>
<td>Bilingualism/biliteracy or limited bilingualism (pluralism if change in dominant attitudes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two-way/dual medium</td>
<td>Mixed dominant and non-dominant</td>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td>High L1 and L2 competence (pluralism, enrichment)</td>
<td>Bilingualism/biliteracy (pluralism/enrichment for both groups)</td>
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Transition

Transitional schooling is generally characterised as a weak form of bilingual education because the L1 is used only or mainly as a bridge to the L2 and is not necessarily seen as an end in itself. In reality, transitional models range from short-term oral use of the L1 at the preschool and/or early primary levels to developing L1 literacy skills over a number of years before transitioning, or changing the language of instruction from the L1 to the L2. The justification for this is Cummins’ (1981) concept of common underlying proficiency, whereby the knowledge of language, literacy and concepts learned in the L1 can be accessed and used in the L2 once oral L2 skills are developed, with no relearning required; this is known as the process of transfer (see also Bialystock, 2001).

To capture the difference between less or more L1 development before transitioning to the L2, a distinction has been made between early-exit and late-exit transitional models. Late-exit programmes, which use the L1 throughout most or all of primary school, have been found to achieve comparatively better results than early-exit programmes in large-scale longitudinal research (Thomas & Collier, 2002). This is because transfer from L1 to L2 is most successful when a good foundation of language and literacy is developed in the mother tongue. Even if the focus is on learning the L2 and the L1 is eventually phased out, late-exit transitional models give learners comparatively more of the L1 support needed to do well in school, as well as more affective benefits such as higher self-esteem.

Among Southern countries that have some form of bilingual schooling, the early-exit transitional model is unfortunately the most common (Heugh, 2006). These programmes attempt to transition from the L1 to the L2 after only two or three years, a period that is insufficient to develop the literacy, communication and academic language skills necessary to promote effective transfer from the L1 and learning through the L2. Based on her exhaustive review of African experiences, Heugh (2006) is highly critical both of early-exit models and of any specialist who promotes them internationally, even as interim measures. I am also suspicious of early-exit models because they often represent minimal educational and/or political concessions to non-dominant groups, and because difficulty in demonstrating significant results (especially in terms of desired L2 proficiency) may convince educators and parents to push for greater exposure to the L2 instead of recognizing the importance of the mother tongue (Benson, 2004a).

Maintenance

This model, also known as developmental maintenance, encompasses a range of programmes that differ in the amount of time and effort put into each language; however, all of them share the goal of bilingualism
(highly competent understanding and speaking of both/all languages) and biliiteracy (highly competent reading and writing of both/all languages). Regarding development of the mother tongue, some programmes front-load it, i.e. begin with mother tongue literacy and learning and oral L2 learning to promote L1 to L2 transfer, while others back-load it to support cognitively challenging, abstract learning in the content areas at upper levels of schooling. What they have in common is that the non-dominant language is developed and remains a significant component of the curriculum, ideally for as long as learners are in school, but minimally through to the end of primary schooling.

There is strong research-based support for maintenance and development programmes, including the principles discussed below, which are related to home language development (minimum 12 years required), L2 learning (minimum five to seven years required), building mother tongue competence as a solid foundation for L2 learning, and continued development of the mother tongue throughout the schooling process (see e.g. Cummins, 2000). It should be noted that all of these principles are commonly followed throughout the world in designing education for speakers of dominant languages. Even the South has cases, for example schooling for speakers of English and Afrikaans in South Africa (Heugh, 2003).

There are few instances of maintenance programmes in the South for speakers of non-dominant languages, however. Bolivia and South Africa both have official policies that call for maintenance and development of non-dominant languages, study of non-dominant languages by members of dominant groups and intercultural education for all; unfortunately, there are large gaps between policy and practice. In the case of South Africa, the policy is not equitably applied to African languages. In the case of Bolivia, lack of trained teachers for upper primary and secondary has greatly limited L1 development, meaning that schooling by default takes more of an early-exit transitional approach (King & Benson, 2004). Ethiopia provides a better example, with an education policy that supports the mother tongue as the medium of instruction for the full eight years of primary schooling (with national language Amharic and official language English taught as subjects). Although implementation is incomplete, this model is practiced for the majority of non-dominant language speakers in three decentralised regions, which have performed better than other regions in all subjects on national assessments at grades 4 and 8 (Heugh, Benson, Bogale and Gebre Yohannes, 2007).

**Immersion**

Immersion is also considered a strong bilingual model in the typology, but it is not easily applicable to Southern contexts. The best known
immersion programme was developed in Canada in the 1960s, where the two languages involved, English and French, are both relatively prestigious and where formally educated parents who opt to put their children into the programme can assist them to become bilingual and biliterate. Immersion programmes use L2 teaching methods to teach children beginning literacy and content instruction in the L2, but the L1 is not ignored; in fact, most immersion programmes include L1 literacy instruction, and even those that do not, can count on the family promoting L1 literacy and oral development at home (Genesee, 1987). This model has also been applied to language revitalization programmes for regional minority groups in Europe (see Baker, 2006). Learners in immersion programmes attain high-level receptive skills in the L2 within a few years, but the productive skills of reading and writing require more development (Swain & Johnson, 1997).

Immersion programmes have distinctive features that make them difficult to apply in other contexts, whether North or South, because: (1) the bilingual teachers are highly competent speakers of the learners’ L2, (2) they have access to research-based methods and materials, and (3) the L1 is used both for literacy and for later content instruction (Tucker, 1986 in Hornberger, 2003). Swain and Johnson (1997: 6) feel there are ‘unwarranted extensions of the term’ immersion by programmes that lack the necessary overt support for the L1. Thus, attempting to apply an immersion model in a minority Northern context or any Southern context would most likely result in a weaker model more closely resembling submersion. Indeed, this has happened, for example with ‘structured immersion’ in the USA, where learners have been taught through ‘sheltered’ L2 only (Lambert, 1984).

Two-way (dual medium)

The final strong form of bilingual education to be discussed here is two-way bilingual education, also known as dual medium, which, like immersion, is not easily applicable to most Southern contexts. Classrooms using the two-way model combine equal proportions of children who are native speakers of two different languages. Whether the languages are dominant or non-dominant, participants have made a choice to learn each other’s languages. Teachers are proficient in both languages, and plan teaching so that all students develop in the L1 while learning (and learning through) the L2. In some contexts, this takes the form of a 50:50 balance between the two languages in teaching and learning; in other contexts there may be greater (90:10) stress on the non-dominant language. The latter context represents a combination of maintenance for learners from the non-dominant group and immersion for learners from the dominant group (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).
The interaction between learners from two linguistic backgrounds contributes to the high performance results documented for dual-medium programmes in US comparative studies (Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Yet two-way models in the North are rare, due mainly to the challenge of finding enough learners from the dominant group who want to learn a non-dominant language. In the South, where socioeconomic gaps between groups are even more pronounced, and where only a small, elite group speaks the dominant language, a model like this is not likely to attract learners in the appropriate proportions. One possible context would be in semi-urban areas where speakers of both dominant and non-dominant languages interact in markets, social services and the informal sector, in which case both groups might feel there would be a benefit to learning each other’s language. There have been attempts to teach elite children non-dominant languages, for example in Bolivia and South Africa due to the above-mentioned intercultural policies, but the predominant view still seems to be that bilingual intercultural education is for non-dominant groups to learn the dominant language and culture (Albó & Anaya, 2003; Chatry-Komarek, 2005).

**Challenges in Applying these Models**

As demonstrated above, the models in Table 4.1 have different connotations and consequences in the South than in the North due to contextual differences and more extreme socioeconomic gaps between dominant and non-dominant ethnolinguistic groups. This section, adapted from Benson (2008), describes recent trends in Southern bilingual education policies and practices to demonstrate how models are being used – and abused.

**Submersion in a dominant language: Less common for the rural poor, more popular for the elite**

Submersion schooling has never had explicit support from international organizations, rights-based groups or educational language specialists, but until recently, educational development efforts have tended to follow national language-in-education policies without interfering. Now there is growing recognition that submersion makes schools highly inefficient and exclusionary, and that if Education for All is to become a reality, it is essential to use languages that learners speak well. Evidence of this trend comes from a range of initiatives: the adoption of large-scale pro-mother tongue education policies in countries like South Africa and Ethiopia; the widening (to additional mother tongues) and occasional deepening (to more than a couple of years of mother tongue use) in countries like Malawi that already had some experience in
bilingual education; the introduction of national languages in countries like Cambodia, Mozambique and Thailand based on experimentation and experience in nonformal education; and even the planned re-introduction of national languages in Ghana and Guinea-Conakry. Papua New Guinea has distinguished itself recently by managing to bring 350 to 400 languages into lower primary education (Kosonen, 2005).

Meanwhile, Southern elite are investing significant personal resources in sending their own children to private schools that submerge learners in a European language, very often English. Underlying this practice is the unfounded assumption that the dominant language is best learned if it is the (sole) medium of instruction. In this context the term used is immersion, but the actual pedagogical practices are closer to those of submersion because the mother tongue gets little or no attention. The increasing demand for private schooling through ‘international’ languages has caused private immersion schools to sprout up in cities all over the world, creating a see-saw effect: while more and more children of nonelite parents are entering such schools, the quality of teaching and learning is becoming more and more questionable (see Rubagumya [2003] on this effect in Tanzania, and Mohanty [2006] regarding India). While elite families can afford higher quality schools and have more resources to promote their children’s learning through a European language, lower-income families aspiring to the same thing are making great sacrifices to put their children in low-quality ‘immersion’ schooling, possibly missing opportunities for a much higher quality mother tongue-based education.

Aspiring to unrealistically high competence in a second/foreign language

Even if a model that includes the mother tongue is adopted, virtually all stakeholders, from policymakers to parents, aspire to the ideal that learners should acquire native-like competence in the dominant language. It would seem that after generations of imposing these languages on speakers of other languages, educators would recognise two things: (1) that native-like competence is unlikely, even for the cleverest of multilingual learners; and (2) that only or mainly the elite benefit, due to their inherited cultural and linguistic capital and enhanced opportunities (Bourdieu, 1991). Alexander (2000) has called this unrealistic aspiration ‘English unassailable but unattainable’ in the South African context.

Native-like competence in a European or urban standard is not only unlikely, it is virtually impossible according to current language acquisition and learning theory. For learners to gain high-level competence in a second or foreign language, they require input from highly competent speakers of that language along with regular and sustained
practice through communicative interaction in different domains, usually in an environment where that language is used regularly, in addition to study of grammatical, phonetic and other linguistic features (Baker, 2006; Cummins, 1999, 2000). In the South, this goal is completely unrealistic for all but the few who have a native speaker at home or who can be sent to places where the language is widely spoken. It is similarly unreachable in the North – for Swedes learning English in Sweden, for example. Neither the ‘native-like’ nor the ‘standard language’ aspect of the goal is reasonable to expect in a non-native environment. This does not mean that learners in multilingual contexts cannot gain reasonable levels of competence in a second or foreign language, but they require an enabling learning environment that includes building a solid foundation in the mother tongue.

**Backwash effects of testing and the requirements of further education**

When there are inconsistencies between different levels of an education system, a negative backwash effect is created, because learners are likely to reject what they are asked to do in the early years if they see that it will have no benefit for what they are asked to do in the future. This analogy comes from backwash (or washback) in testing, which refers to the extent to which a test asks learners to perform what they have been taught to perform (see e.g. Hughes, 2003). Heugh made this analogy in Ethiopia, where our four-member research team was commissioned to determine how the different semiautonomous regions of the country were implementing mother tongue-based schooling (Heugh et al., 2007, 2009 this volume). As mentioned above, the sound national policy calls for mother tongue medium for the full eight years of primary schooling, which could be considered a maintenance and development model, and learners from the three regions most consistent with the policy have achieved the best results on national examinations. Yet, despite the sound policy and strong evidence of its success, other regions have not adopted the eight-year model, there is public pressure to use English as medium of instruction increasingly earlier, and private English-medium schools proliferate. Why? The answer lies in what comes after primary in the Ethiopian education system, i.e. English-medium secondary schooling, and in large-scale efforts by the Ministry of Education and English-speaking donors to promote English throughout the system. There is no such effort to support mother tongue education, nor is there any mention of an educational role for Amharic, a widely spoken national language (Heugh et al., 2007). In this case, inconsistencies in the system have caused an effective mother tongue model to be challenged instead of expanded.
**Contexts and Clarifications of Language and Learning Principles**

In light of the challenges of applying bilingual models in different contexts, I propose a shift in focus to a set of widely agreed principles of language learning and cognitive development and how they may be applicable. These principles, based mainly on research in high-income countries, are likely to be relevant in the South because they deal with human linguistic development, though we clearly need to consider where multilingual contexts may be different. If some of these understandings can be put across to policymakers, they are more likely to be able to design their own models based not only on what is desirable, but also on what is possible in their contexts. Similarly, if these understandings can be put across to practitioners, they will be better equipped to design their own materials and methods, and to make adaptations if they see that certain strategies are not working with their particular students.

It will not always be possible to design educational programmes in multilingual contexts that are immediately in line with these principles due to constraints like teacher availability, materials development and financial resources, and some adaptations must be made for multilingual learners. However, if these principles are kept in mind, measures taken in the short term can be directed toward building up conditions that enable the planning and implementation of more theoretically sound (and thus feasible) programmes that are more likely to support effective learning.

**The importance of mother tongue development**

Children are still developing competence in the mother tongue at adolescence, including more complex, adult-like grammatical structures and many other features of communicative competence; there are various estimates of how long this process goes on, but a modest estimate based on research reviewed by Ducther (1994) is that it continues at least to age 12. For effective development to occur, children require input and interaction with more knowledgeable speakers of the mother tongue, as well as exposure to a range of new information and experiences, like that which schools can offer. Reading, writing and cognitive development contribute significantly to this process (Cummins, 2000). Thus, if children begin school at age 6 or 7, it will be optimal for them to gain initial literacy in the L1, study it as a language and learn through the L1 until at least grade 5 or 6.

In multilingual contexts, especially those that rely almost exclusively on oral rather than written communication, the relationship of age to ‘adult-level language’ has not been researched to my knowledge. It would also be interesting to see research in the South on multilingual oral
competencies among young children and how these could be better utilised and developed in school. There is evidence that in the absence of children’s actual mother tongues, a ‘close’ L2 can function well because of its linguistic or social proximity to the home language. This L2 might be a lingua franca like a creole (see e.g. Benson [2003] on the Kiriol experiment in Guinea-Bissau; Siegel [1997] on creoles in education), a national language like Kiswahili in Tanzania or Amharic in Ethiopia, or a related non-dominant language like some state languages in Nigeria (Bambose, 2000) and India (Mohanty, 2006).

Regarding beginning literacy in a non-dominant language, there are at least two reasons to examine appropriate methodologies for Southern contexts. One reason is that teachers who learned through foreign languages have a tendency to use repetition and rote memorization when children should be decoding on their own and reading for meaning (Benson, 2004b). Another reason is that oft-used phonemic literacy teaching methods may be inappropriate for the linguistic features of the mother tongues being taught, as Trudell and Schroeder (2007) have recently suggested in the case of Bantu languages.

The need for L2 development if it is to be used for content instruction

A modest estimate is that children require five to seven years of school-based L2 learning before they can learn academic subjects exclusively through the L2 (Hakuta, Butler and Witt, 2000). This is due to the decontextualised and abstract nature of academic language, which represents a serious challenge to students from grade 3 on (Cummins, 2000, 2009 this volume). Basic communicative skills in the L2 are useful, but they are not enough to support high-level thinking and learning skills. Use of the L2 as a medium of instruction can contribute to L2 learning if teachers use techniques to make the input comprehensible (Krashen, 1985, 2002; Krashen & Brown, 2005).

This principle is based on research in Northern contexts where the L2 is widely spoken by highly competent speakers inside and outside of the school. In another context, Spolsky and Shohamy (1999) reported that seven to nine years of school-based L2-learning were needed for immigrants in Israel before using L2 as a medium. It cannot be expected in Southern contexts that the L2 will be an effective medium of instruction, at least not exclusively, within a five- to seven-year time period. The critical point around grade 3 between learning to read and reading to learn is especially problematic in low-income countries (Heugh, 2006, 2009 this volume), as evidenced by markedly high dropout rates, and cannot be separated from language issues. In addition, it may be unrealistic to expect that L2 teaching can be communicatively
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Based; it may be more effective to teach the L2 ‘for specific purposes’, i.e. to prepare students to comprehend content materials, while instruction should continue through the L1 or bilingually.

Building competence in the L1 facilitates learning of additional languages

Though it may appear counterintuitive, the bilingual programmes that result in the best student performance in L1, L2 and subject areas by the end of primary school, are those that continue to invest in L1 thinking and learning. The quality of teaching and learning in both languages is much more important than early and/or maximum exposure to the L2 (Cummins, 1999, 2000; Heugh, 2006; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Systems that rush learners to ‘transition’ to all-L2 learning are depriving them of a strong, L1-based foundation of prior learning, experiences and competencies. Students should therefore have the opportunity to learn through the mother tongue for as long as possible, and the mother tongue should remain part of the curriculum (at least as a subject of study) throughout their school careers. Even if a system requires knowledge to be demonstrated in the L2 at certain points through national examinations, both/all languages should be assessed, and bilingual content examinations will allow learners to demonstrate their full capabilities.

There is some evidence from Southern contexts that long-term mother tongue use generates the best results in L2 and the content areas. This evidence comes from the six-year Yoruba primary project in Nigeria (Akinnaso, 1993), whose positive results were unfortunately never generalised in the country (Bamgbose, 2000); from former Bantu Education in South Africa, which despite its apartheid roots, generated better school achievement results than present-day English submersion (Heugh, 2003); and from countries like Eritrea (Walter, 2008) and Ethiopia (Heugh et al., 2007) that are using their languages for primary schooling.

Transfer is a process that can be facilitated

The reason that L1 development facilitates learning of and in additional languages is that there is transfer of linguistic features, concepts and meanings. Introduction of an additional language into the curriculum does not necessitate the relearning of concepts already learned through the L1. Hakuta (1986) among others has provided clear evidence that basic literacy and numeracy concepts need to be learned only once in life. As Tucker (2003: 467) says, we still need to learn more about the contexts and strategies that facilitate transfer, but ‘the fact that such transfer occurs should not be a topic for debate’. While transfer can happen from L2 to L1 (and indeed this is often a condition in training of new bilingual teachers whose prior education was exclusively in a L2),
it is clearly most efficient to begin with cognitive skills and strategies in the more familiar language (Krashen, 2002). Transfer between languages can be facilitated through explicit instruction of features that are not common to the two languages, such as phonemes, graphemes and grammatical structures (see e.g. Baker, 2006).

Transfer is a feature of human learning that has equal import in Southern contexts. An innovative evaluation method used by Hovens (2002) in Niger demonstrated the power of transfer in either direction by testing students in bilingual and French submersion classes in both languages, despite the fact that submersion students had never been taught L1 literacy. He was able to establish that the highest scores were attained by bilingual students tested in the L1, then by bilingual students tested in the L2, followed by submersion students tested in the L1, and in last place submersion students tested in the L2. Submersion students were therefore able to apply their L2 literacy to knowledge of the home language enough to facilitate understanding of the tests, while still outperformed by those who studied in their L1.

There are two other aspects of transfer in Southern contexts that are worthy of mention here. One is the potentially beneficial but yet untapped level of metalinguistic awareness that multilingual children in the South may be bringing to their schooling experience. An example of this is what Alexander (2007) calls a ‘fifth dimension’ of multilingualism: the capacity to interpret/translate between languages with facility. Another is the ability to transfer literacy competence between languages that use different writing systems. Kenner’s (2004) recent work indicates that children may experience simultaneous biliteracy, which means that transfer is less linear than envisioned, and that Cummins’ (1981) concept of interdependence holds true for bi- and multilingual literacies (see also Bialystock, 2001).

To conclude this section, Tucker (2003: 466) makes the following point regarding such principles: 'If the goal is to help the student ultimately develop the highest possible degree of content mastery and second language proficiency, time spent instructing the child in a familiar language is a wise investment'. It should be noted that there are many other excellent arguments for using a familiar language, including affective benefits, rights-based and biodiversity reasoning (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), which I have not included in this discussion, but which are equally relevant.

**Designing Effective Schooling based on Realistic Strategies**

To summarise the argument, I believe that rather than discussing models, we should be promoting understanding on the part of all
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stakeholders of the principles of language acquisition and learning. This would help people to evaluate the existing conditions, define relevant goals and determine the most realistic means to reach these goals. The procedure might include the following steps:

- raising awareness of principles of language acquisition and learning;
- determining a set of educational and linguistic goals;
- looking at the available human, material and financial resources realistically;
- determining what interventions are required in the short, medium and long term to reach the goals;
- designing programmes that address the goals in an ongoing way;
- implementing a cyclical process of planning, piloting, reflection, evaluation and analysis.

Planning can begin once stakeholders have understood the language and learning principles discussed above. The first step would be to realistically assess the situation(s) for which an educational language programme will be designed. While this can be done at the national level in a generalised way, there may be difficulty if different regions present exceptions to the rule, and every effort should be made to survey the different regions or language groups that will be involved.

Table 4.2 illustrates how critical language-related competencies on the part of learners, educators and family members can be included in planning discussions. The table contains fictional information that is likely to be true in many parts of the Oromiya Region in Ethiopia. Once actual language competence has been assessed, the current situation can be compared with educational aims. This will reveal what kind of language teaching and/or learning is expected of whom. Finally, reference to the principles (as well as other research-based information) can provide information about how long it might take realistically to reach those aims, and what inputs would be necessary.

As Table 4.2 shows, children enter school with high oral skills in Language A (their mother tongue, Afan Oromo) and some possible oral skills in Language B (the national lingua franca, Amharic), but no exposure to Language C (the official language, English). Let us assume that the goal of the school system is for these children to reach high levels of competence in all three languages.

In this case, learners are exposed completely or mostly to Language A outside the school, as members of their families and community are A speakers, so this is their strongest language and the one that should be used to build a strong literacy and learning foundation in primary that continues throughout secondary schooling. Language A is currently used for literacy and learning for the entire eight years of primary schooling in the Oromiya Region. As learners are expected to reach high levels of
Table 4.2 Illustration of language competence for planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Language A</th>
<th></th>
<th>Language B</th>
<th></th>
<th>Language C</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L1 = Afan Oromo</td>
<td></td>
<td>L2 = Amharic</td>
<td></td>
<td>L3 = English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>List/Spk</td>
<td>Read/Wr</td>
<td>List/Spk</td>
<td>Read/Wr</td>
<td>List/Spk</td>
<td>Read/Wr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners incoming</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families and communities</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High to moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School directors</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High to moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainers and curriculum developers</td>
<td>(Varied)</td>
<td>(Varied)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High to moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
literacy in A, teachers and school directors may need to improve on their moderate literacy levels; fortunately, as their oral skills are high, a short course and/or practice with a local intellectual will probably suffice. Depending on their prior experience and training, they might also benefit from inservice workshops on L1 methodology. Only some trainers and curriculum developers can serve as resources for Language A, and they may also require methodology training.

As for Language B, learner exposure outside the school is limited because B is spoken by some members of the community (usually youth or adults) in some domains. This outside exposure may increase as learners grow older, but it is likely that that their main input in B will be through the school. Language B is currently taught as a subject beginning at grade 3 or grade 5, and is a required subject throughout secondary schooling, but until recently, the same curriculum has been used for native speakers and learners of B. Based on the fact that B is an important lingua franca and national language of Ethiopia, our research team recommended strengthening its study and use as an L2 (Heugh et al., 2007). This would suggest giving B more of a role in the primary (and secondary) school curricula, i.e. strengthening teaching and learning of B as a second/foreign language beginning in lower primary and using some bilingual methods in upper primary so that both A and B can be used in secondary schooling. As learners will rely almost exclusively on their teachers for their B input, teachers will need ongoing training and practice in B literacy, building on their moderate to high speaking competence. In this case, A and B have different writing systems, so teachers may need reminders and/or clarification of B writing conventions. Further, teachers will require strong inservice training in second/foreign language teaching methodology as well as access to appropriate B as L2 curriculum and materials. School directors, trainers and curriculum developers can be good language resource people, but may need to upgrade their L2 methodology background.

Regarding Language C, neither learners nor their families are exposed to input outside the school, and even teachers’ and school directors’ exposure and competence is highly limited. Language C is currently taught as a subject beginning at grade 1, and it becomes the exclusive medium of instruction of secondary schooling beginning at grade 9. All primary teachers are meant to attend an inservice programme to upgrade their language skills as well as to learn second/foreign language methodology, and radio broadcasts provide classroom support during C lessons. However, due to lack of use of this language and/or insufficient training, primary teachers’ competence in C is too low for them to teach it effectively at this time, nor can their school directors give them the support they require. Based on current conditions in primary schooling and the fact that secondary education in C is not comprehensible to the
majority of learners in Ethiopia, our research team recommended taking C out of the primary curriculum until teachers can gain the appropriate competence, and we seriously questioned its usefulness as a medium of instruction at the secondary level (Heugh et al., 2007). As trainers themselves have only moderate competence in C, it is currently unrealistic to expect primary school learners to reach high levels of spoken and written C. There is little choice but to adjust the aims of schooling to more realistic levels, at least until appropriate training and language assessment mechanisms can be put in place. Meanwhile, strong mother tongue-based learning and more reliance on Language B as L2 should give learners in Oromiya Region the best opportunity to gain a quality education.

This example from one region in Ethiopia illustrates how educational planning in a multilingual context can benefit from a realistic approach to language and learning. More subtly, it shows how Ethiopian policy has apparently relied on a kind of trilingual model that begins with the L1 in primary school, adds the L2 and third language (L3) as subjects and ‘transitions’ to the L3 at the secondary level. As a model, it might seem somewhat logical and even progressive because of its use of the L1 for the entire eight years of primary schooling. However, a more careful examination of learners’ existing language skills and the available human resources reveals that the aims of the system are currently unattainable. Coupled with an understanding of language and learning principles, this analysis provides insights into how to design a system that builds on existing resources in a pedagogically effective way.

**Directions for the Future**

This chapter has discussed how a set of bilingual models from the North has impacted on policy and practice in the multilingual South. I have claimed that application of these models has limited potential for informing effective decision-making concerning mother tongue-based schooling, and I have proposed an alternative approach to bi- or multilingual programme design that focuses on language and learning principles to determine how to reach educational goals given existing resources.

The Oromiya Region, illustrated above, highlights the importance of investing in teachers and building on their strengths, a point that has been strongly made by Chatry-Komarek (2003) and Komarek (2003) and supported by cost-benefit analysts (as reviewed in Heugh, 2006). As I have noted elsewhere (Benson, 2004b), teachers from the same communities as their students have a repertoire of useful skills along with their languages – metalinguistic awareness, cultural insights, local credibility, good communication with parents/caregivers – but they usually require
L1 literacy and vocabulary development along with bilingual methodologies. Furthermore, their competence in additional languages needs to be developed and fairly assessed. As the Ethiopian case demonstrates, it is pointless to have a foreign language in the curriculum if neither teachers nor students have had the opportunity to develop the necessary language skills.

How can teachers develop the necessary skills? Recent work with a colleague in Angola reminded me that it is difficult to initiate mother tongue-based educational programmes if the professional workforce consists of teachers, teacher trainers, curriculum developers and linguists who have little or no background in using local languages. Where university linguists in Angola have historically worked in European languages, efforts are now being made to include national languages in descriptive and applied linguistics faculties. In Southern contexts like Angola, there is an urgent need for applied researchers with a commitment to improving the quality of educational services available to members of non-dominant linguistic communities. They could benefit greatly from links with the nonformal education sector, as community-based literacy and alternative education programmes tend to have much more experience in using local languages (see Malone [2005] in Asian contexts).

Finally, as mentioned earlier, there are a number of areas where research in multilingual Southern contexts could contribute a great deal to the field of bilingual education. Some research topics mentioned were: the relationship between learners’ multilingual oral competence and literacy; language-appropriate strategies for teaching L1 literacy; time and quality of L2 input needed to facilitate transfer; and effective methodology for teaching an L2 used only/mainly for future learning, not for communication. Such research would provide invaluable inputs into the proposed reality-based process of designing mother tongue-based programmes in multilingual contexts.