Opening and Filling up Implementational and Ideological Spaces in Heritage Language

Education

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Wonderfully and characteristically, Jim Cummins has written a startlingly clear and practical piece on a topic both theoretically and politically complex. I agree with everything he has to say – from his definitions of what we mean by heritage languages to his classroom-level strategies of what to do to consolidate and affirm them. There is nothing for me to add there. What I can do, though, is reinforce and extend some of his points, with particular attention to international, indigenous, and policy perspectives. In the comments that follow, I take up three such extensions: the notion of opening and filling up ideological and implementational spaces in order to advance heritage language education, the significance of bottom-up language planning in relation to heritage language resources, and the value of working (at both policy and classroom levels) from a conception of biliteracy in developing learners' heritage language talents and identities.

Cummins focuses on the roles of individual educators and communities in much the same way and for the same reasons that I have talked about language educators and language users *opening and filling up ideological and implementational spaces*. Comparing the ideological spaces opened up by multilingual language and education policies in South Africa and Bolivia in the past decade with those abruptly closed down in the United States with enactment of No Child Left Behind in 2002, I've suggested that

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it is essential for language educators and language users to fill up implementational

spaces with multilingual educational practices, whether with intent to occupy ideological

spaces opened up by policies or to actively prod toward more favorable ideological

spaces in the face of restrictive policies. Ideological spaces created by language and

education policies can be seen as carving out implementational ones at classroom and

community levels, but implementational spaces can also serve as wedges to pry open

ideological ones (Hornberger 2002, 2005b).

The notion of opening and filling up ideological and implementational spaces for

multilingual education (Hornberger 2002) was originally inspired by Chick's (2001,

2003) suggestion that the emergence of alternative multicultural discourses he observed

among teachers in South Africa was enabled by the ideological space which new

multilingual language policies had opened up. In like vein, Alexander affirms that "the

fact that [constitutional and legislative] instruments exist is of the greatest significance [in

that they] represent democratic space for the legal and peaceful promotion of

multilingualism and for mother tongue based bilingual education in South Africa" (2003:

15). Similarly, Bolivia's Education Reform of 1994, with its two key planks of bilingual

intercultural education for all and popular participation in school governance, opened up

significant new ideological and implementational spaces for indigenous heritage

language education in Quechua, Aymara, Guarani, and other indigenous languages of

Bolivia (Albó 2000; Hornberger & López 1998).

Implementational spaces bear some affinity to what Gutiérrez et al. (1999) call the

third space in reference to hybrid classroom practices, although implementational spaces

encompass spaces beyond the classroom as well, at every level from face-to-face

interaction in communities to national educational policies and indeed to globalized

economic relations. In a recent *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* special issue on

indigenous epistemologies and education, Morgan (2005:98-100) highlights the role of

special language events, such as a Native American Dance Showcase, at Michigan State

University's Ojibwe language program in *creating space* for intergenerational

indigenous language use beyond the classroom, for both learners and local communities.

In that same issue, Cazden draws attention to the importance of *creating and using*

openings toward alternative structures and flexible implementation in our educational

systems in order to enable Indigenous educational development, citing as two examples

New Zealand's national educational assessments available in Maori language, and in

Alaska, the use of alternative guidelines and standards developed by the Assembly of

Alaska Native Educators (Ismail & Cazden 2005:90). These kinds of openings exemplify

the opening and filling up of ideological and implementational spaces for the promotion

of heritage language education -- at classroom, community, and policy levels.

Cummins elegantly summarizes the "no-win" logic that has characterized United

States language education policies for generations, absurdly and effectively squelching

heritage indigenous, refugee, and immigrant languages in schoolchildren while

simultaneously seeking rather unsuccessfully and halfheartedly to develop foreign

language resources -- often the very same languages and often in the very same children.

Examples mentioned by Cummins in his brief piece include French, Spanish, Hebrew,

Urdu, Greek; other obvious examples in the United States are Chinese (see, for example,

Wang, 2004), Korean (see, for example, Jeon, 200; Pak, 2005), Japanese, Russian,

Portuguese; but there are many, many more, including indigenous languages such as

Navajo, Ojibwe, and Quechua, the latter an "immigrant indigenous" language in the U.S. context. I would suggest as well that immigrant languages include the languages of both voluntary and involuntary immigrants (Ogbu, 1978; Ogbu & Simons, 1998); hence the squandering of African slaves' heritage language resources in the early centuries of the nation's history is part of this same picture. As Cummins underlines, this longtime ideological paradox been more recently been exacerbated by the volatile politics of bilingual education and especially the high-pressure, English-language, high-stakes testing provisions of No Child Left Behind.

It is in this paranoid educational policy context that Cummins advocates including micro policy contexts in addition to the macro context of large-scale policy and funding initiatives, in much the same way that I have highlighted the possibilities opened up by bottom-up language planning as vehicle of cultural expression and door of opportunity for indigenous language speakers, in relation to indigenous literacies (Hornberger, 1996). Similarly, just as applied linguists increasingly foreground the role of the teacher as policy-maker in English language teaching (e.g., Ricento & Hornberger, 1996), Cummins here foregrounds the role of the teacher as policy-maker in heritage language teaching as well.

Specifically, Cummins pinpoints instructional strategies that simultaneously promote students' heritage language proficiency and their academic development in English, strategies that can be pursued in both in-school and out-of-school programs, whether bilingual or English-medium. He offers concrete examples of bilingual instructional strategies that teach explicitly for transfer across languages, as an alternative to the monolingual instructional strategies and ideologies that, as he points out, in fact

have minimal research basis. The basic premise behind the bilingual instructional strategies is exactly the same as that behind my continua of biliteracy model, namely that bi/multilinguals' learning is maximized when they are allowed and enabled to draw from across all their existing language skills (in two+ languages), rather than being constrained and inhibited from doing so by monolingual instructional assumptions and practices.

The continua of biliteracy offers a heuristic for policy-makers, researchers, and educational practitioners, by which to design, employ, and evaluate specific strategies in specific contexts; Cummins here identifies three generic strategies which can be adapted to specific contexts: attention to cognate relationships across languages, creation of student-authored dual language books, and collaboration in cross-language sister class projects via the internet. All of these strategies provide the kinds of biliterate learning media, content, and contexts the continua model affirms for successful biliterate development (Hornberger, 2003). In his conclusion, Cummins writes of tapping into students' pre-existing knowledge and of the affective as well as cognitive benefits that ensue, phrases which evoke for me the continua of biliteracy. Similarly, in resonance with my notion of opening and filling up ideological and implementational spaces for biliteracy, he speaks of opening up instructional spaces for teaching that actively promotes cross-lingual transfer and language awareness.

In closing, Cummins highlights the importance of affirming heritage language learners' multilingual talents as a valued component of their identities. Earlier in the essay, he had noted that when school contexts reinforce status differentials between home and school languages, students disengage their identities from their home languages and the process of language loss is accelerated. Negotiating identities for an empowering

education has been a consistent and important emphasis in Cummins' work (e.g. Cummins 1986, 1996).

Shuhan Wang and I have recently discussed the crucial role of identity in heritage language education, beginning from the very definition of heritage language and heritage language learners (HLLs). We take the view that heritage language learners in the U.S. are defined not only by their familial or ancestral ties to a particular language that is not English, but also by exerting their agency in determining whether or not they are heritage language learners of that heritage language and heritage culture. Consistent with our view that identity includes not just how one sees oneself, but also how one is being viewed by others, we go on to analyze how heritage language learners position themselves and are positioned in the continua of context, content, media, and development of biliteracy. So for example, in considering the continua of contexts for biliteracy, we highlight how the creative tension of *E Pluribus Unum* in U.S. language ideology affects all the contexts in which U.S. HLLs find themselves. In relation to the continua of biliterate content, we question whether the kind of content HLLs are provided with and choose to engage in is about *bringing heritage forward* or rather focused on some kind of frozen or encapsulated or even misrepresented past (cf. Kaomea, 2005 on indigenous studies in the elementary Hawaiian classroom). In considering the continua of biliterate media, we ask "*who needs it?,*" drawing attention to the functions that heritage languages serve as both medium of communication and medium of instruction at societal and individual levels. Finally, in taking up the continua of biliterate development under the rubric of *I Pledge Allegiance*, and drawing on both Ruiz' (1984) notions of language as problem, right, and resource and Rampton's (1995) typology of language expertise and allegiance, we

consider how both society and HLLs themselves position HLLs' expertise in and allegiance to their heritage languages as variously and simultaneously problem, right, and resource. We conclude with questions and admonitions to guide heritage language learners, at both individual and community level, in their bottom-up language planning for biliteracy (Hornberger & Wang, 2005).

Though both Cummins' essay and my commentary have focused primarily on the United States, the themes highlighted here -- of biliteracy and identity, bottom up language planning, and the urgency of opening and filling up implementational and ideological spaces with multilingual educational policies, assumptions and practices-- have equal relevance for heritage language contexts elsewhere, even where they are not referred to by that name. Cummins notes that although the term heritage language dates back to 1977 in Canada, terms like international, ethnic, *langue d'origine* 'language of origin,' and aboriginal are also used there. He also takes note of the composite term heritage/community language, adopted at a recent United States/Australia dialogue conference to refer to indigenous, refugee, and immigrant languages in both national contexts; community language has been the term in use in Australia for some time (Hornberger, 2005a). Local languages, local literacies, local knowledges are increasingly foregrounded for attention in language education policy and planning all around the world, in a move which indexes precisely the heritage languages and cultures we are referring to here (e.g., Barton, 1994; Canagarajah 2002, 2005; Lin & Martin 2005; McCarty et al., 2005; McCarty, Lipka, & Dick, 1994; Omoniyi, 2003; Tadadjeu, 2004).

Heritage languages go by many names -- local languages and community languages, ethnic languages and aboriginal languages, immigrant languages and

indigenous languages among them. In South Africa, reserving the term African languages for indigenous languages (excluding colonial languages) is a hotly contested issue. In Bolivia, the terms *pueblos originarios* 'originary peoples' (or 'first peoples' cf. Gustafson 2002) and *lenguas originarias* 'originary languages,' coined by indigenous groups themselves as an alternative to the pejorative connotations associated with the terms *indio* 'indian', *indígena* 'indigenous person', and *campesino* 'peasant', are now in wide use, especially with the impetus of the 1994 Education Reform (Albó, 2000: 18, 21; Albó, 1995:423-426). Yet, although the term originary is intended as inclusive of all those peoples whose history in that place goes back to pre-colonial times, the trajectory of its coinage and usage to some extent also reinscribes the former indigenous (Amazonian)-peasant (Andean) divide as now an 'indigenous-originary' divide (Luis Enrique López, personal communication, 21 June 2005).

None of the terms for heritage language is in fact ever straightforward or neutral, even when it is originally intended to be so; rather these terms are contested and ever-shifting in meaning, even as the local heritage identities, knowledges, and purposes the languages convey are also inevitably contested and ever-shifting in their national contexts. That fluidity and negotiation is, I believe, the surest evidence of the adaptability and long-term survival of heritage languages in our ever-changing world. Indigenous peoples, for example,

> have sustained their unique worldviews and associated knowledge systems for
> millennia, even while undergoing major social upheavals as a result of
> transformative forces beyond their control. Many of the core values, beliefs, and
> practices associated with those worldviews have survived and are beginning to be

recognized as being just as valid for today's generations as they were for

generations past (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005, p. 9).

Many indigenous, refugee, voluntary and involuntary immigrant heritage languages and

ways of knowing have survived despite overwhelming transformative forces and

oppressive educational policies and practices, but many have not. To the degree that our

educational ideologies and implementational practices can facilitate and encourage the

adaptation and survival of heritage languages and identities through the kinds of bilingual

instructional assumptions and strategies Cummins offers here, I, for one, am convinced

our world will be the better for it.

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