

# The Teaching of Spanish as a Second Language in an Indigenous Bilingual Intercultural Curriculum

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This paper reports on the implementation of an ambitious bilingual instructional programme in the P'urhepecha-speaking region of Michoacán state in Mexico, the Meseta Tarasca. A curriculum of indigenous language preservation and cultural affirmation, overturning the previous Spanish-only programme, has been developed by a group of indigenous teachers in two P'urhepecha elementary schools, 'Miguel Hidalgo' of San Isidro and 'Benito Juárez' in the neighbouring village of Uringuitiro. Today, the P'urhepecha language is the nucleus of the curriculum. With the previous curriculum largely discredited, the bilingual teachers embarked on a project that would both provide instruction to children in a language they understand, and contribute to the preservation of their indigenous language, which in these communities, in all cases, is children's first language (L1). Being cognizant of the importance of learning Spanish as a second language, a major current planning and curriculum design priority is to find a way to integrate Spanish language instruction into the academic subject areas in accordance with current models of content-based second language teaching.

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## Introduction

In 1995 the P'urhepecha teachers of two bilingual elementary schools in Michoacán, in the central Highlands of Mexico, introduced radical changes to the previous curriculum which had been based on the fast transition to Spanish and submersion L2 Spanish instruction. From that school year onwards, they have been teaching all subject matter including literacy and mathematics in P'urhepecha, the children's first language. In this paper we take up some of the special circumstances that educators need to take into account that may be different from those in which the social imbalance between the languages of the bilingual community is less pronounced. In the communities in which the study has been carried out, the overwhelming majority of children entering first grade in 'Miguel Hidalgo' and 'Benito Juárez' bilingual elementary schools are monolingual speakers of the

indigenous language. Outside of school, in fact, P'urhepecha dominates all interpersonal communicative language use domains; and access to Spanish-language television programming is significantly more limited than in other rural communities in Central Mexico. The new bilingual programmes face a new challenge, born of their initial success in attracting and retaining significantly larger numbers of students, an approximately 60% increase in total enrolment (Hamel & Ibáñez Caselli, 2000), in comparison to previous years when perhaps a kind of early selection was imposed based on children's ability to benefit academically from instruction exclusively in Spanish. What kind of programme design and distribution of languages across the curriculum will serve the triple objectives of indigenous language development/revitalisation and a significant improvement both in general academic achievement and in the second language learning of Spanish? This question is posed most immediately for children whose primary or sole contact with the national language is in school, those who perhaps are more likely to stay in school now thanks to the current linguistically inclusionary approach.

In the broad international discussion on bilingualism and school language policy, two rationales could be advanced for the inclusion of a vernacular that is children's mother tongue/primary language (MT/L1): (1) strong ethno-linguistic loyalty on the part of a significant portion of the speech community which supports an active project of language preservation or revitalisation, and (2) if the indigenous language (IL) is the only language that children understand, its exclusion from the curriculum represents a potentially serious obstacle to academic achievement for many children, in particular in the case of literacy learning. Or inverting the terms: the inclusion of the IL has the potential of significantly upgrading children's academic achievement, including the skills of reading and writing.

Logically, and often in practice, the rationales of language preservation/revitalisation (1) and the linguistic/pedagogical (2) are separate. The latter may come to be an important ingredient in facilitating initial access to academic discourse and literacy in the absence of a broad community-wide revitalisation project (although acquiescence would be a minimum condition). The former rationale would also be sufficient even in the context of child bilingualism in which the great majority of the first grade population is comprised of fluent speakers of the national language (NL), as is the case, for example, in most IL bilingual programmes in Canada and the United States. In the participating Michoacán communities of the present study, by all accounts, the two rationales coincide and mutually reinforce each other (Alonso *et al.*, 2001; Hamel & Ibáñez Caselli, 2000; Silva Castellón, 2004), making for a privileged site for observation of a bilingual instructional programme in which the IL forms an integral part of the core curriculum. Extensive ethnographic description has in fact confirmed this programmatic feature (Bernabé, 2006; Hamel, in press), placing this school/community project on a short list of current pilot experiments in IL bilingualism of this type in Latin America.

The previous Spanish-only model proved to be especially problematic for children with little or no contact with the language of literacy and instructional discourse outside of school. We could say that this posed a persistent and deep contradiction between the official objective of elementary schooling,

literacy, and a necessary objective, learning Spanish as a second language, resulting in neither being attained satisfactorily (Hamel, 1988). Despite official educational policy, in place for the last two decades, that would seem to address this contradiction, little tangible progress is in evidence in rural schools that serve children who are beginning learners of Spanish as a second language.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1980s language policy across Latin America began to gradually shift toward establishing new relationships between the central educational authorities and indigenous peoples. Recognition of indigenous languages as a part of the nation's cultural patrimony was extended to school language policy that granted communities the right to incorporate their languages into the academic programme of public schooling, including explicit endorsements of developmental bilingual instruction based on the general principles of intercultural curriculum design (DGEI, 1990). While implementation has clearly lagged far behind, official policies have opened the way for a number of important experimental programmes, research projects, and most importantly, a small number of community-based initiatives spearheaded usually by a young generation of indigenous teachers fully proficient in the community language and introduced to the scientific literature on bilingualism and bilingual education during their studies in the various regional campuses of the Universidad Nacional Pedagógica.

Returning to the international discussion on bilingualism and school language policy, the now well-known debates touch on even more fundamental problems into which the Michoacán project inserts itself in a very self-conscious way. Among the different perspectives specifically related to indigenous languages and other vernaculars, we could frame one set of central questions as follows. Three distinct hypotheses would make different predictions regarding the inclusion of the IL (in some significant proportion) into the academic curriculum, and specifically as a medium of literacy teaching:

- (1) That it would come to represent an unnecessary obstacle to general academic achievement, learning to read and write, and, pointedly, to full acquisition of the national/second language (NL/L2).
- (2) Neither obstacle nor expediting factor – that exclusive NL/L2 medium instruction poses no significant disadvantage to monolingual MT/L1 speakers *vis-à-vis* the three learning domains (general academic achievement, literacy, and L2 learning of the national language).
- (3) That all other extraneous considerations held constant, the inclusion of the indigenous language represents a facilitative factor in at least one or two of the above learning domains, and no disadvantage to any; and that learning is expedited as a function of child monolingual speakers' extracurricular access to the NL/L2 (i.e. in the case of Mexico, the benefit of MT/L1 inclusion would be potentially most important for students with the least contact with Spanish outside of school).

The Michoacán project forms part of a research current that has set out to find supporting evidence for hypothesis (3), fundamentally an updated and modern version of the UNESCO (1953) proposal on the use of vernacular languages in school (Crawford, 2000; Hovens, 2002; Tabors & Snow, 2001);

for Latin America: Escobar (2004), Hamel (2000) and López (1998, 2001). Proponents of both strong and weak versions of hypothesis (1) congregate around a series of politically driven proposals, most notably associated with the English-only movement in the United States (Porter, 1990). The clearest exposition of the 'no-difference' hypothesis (2) is Wagner (1998), although perhaps presenting a slightly qualified version.

### **Application of the Concept of the Common Underlying Proficiency to Indigenous Language Bilingualism**

A central theoretical framework that guides the analysis of findings from San Isidro and Uringuitiro is the Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) model of Cummins (2000, in its most recent presentation).<sup>2</sup> The next section will propose a series of permutations of the well-known double-iceberg figure for the purpose of highlighting the relationship between linguistic competence in L1 and/or L2 and the development of cognitive/academic abilities that are 'shared' in a purported 'common', or 'central', domain, but that nevertheless require for their construction and consolidation a linguistic medium. Crucially (as the above hypothesis (3) implies), the linguistic competencies that correspond to this medium must be sufficiently developed so as to ensure a minimum threshold level of comprehension and sufficiently developed expressive capability on the part of preliterate child learners.

A previous study by Francis (2000, 2004) also sought to apply Cummins' framework to the special sociolinguistic circumstances of indigenous language bilingualism, although quite different from those of the P'urhepecha schools. In an assessment of bilinguals' ability to access abilities and skills from the CUP, in this case learned primarily through Spanish, and stored in the common 'underlying', or central, domains (where the icebergs 'overlap'), children were presented with academic language tasks in their indigenous language (Nahuatl, from Tlaxcala state). Findings showed that access to these ('non-language-bound') proficiencies was relatively unfettered, one could say surprisingly so (although not completely) given the sharp sociolinguistic and material imbalances that would conceivably favour performance in Spanish in an overwhelming and one-sidedly dominating way. Performance in Spanish did appear to be somewhat superior, as would be expected given that it was the language in which children practiced their literacy skills. Nevertheless, performance in Nahuatl on these same skills, even though they were rarely practiced, showed significant upward tendencies of improvement across the grades. One conclusion that presented itself for further inquiry was that the Cummins model – specifically the autonomy (from L1 and L2) of conceptual structures, metacognitive and discourse organising abilities, information processing mechanisms related to literacy, etc. – offers a uniquely useful way of analysing bilingual proficiency. And that the unfavourable distribution of resources and the overbounding social imbalances of all kinds that might militate against developing literacy-related abilities in an indigenous language do not significantly obstruct or short-circuit the availability of CUP-domain abilities.

In a number of ways the Michoacán bilingual programme presents a more interesting context – than that of Tlaxcala and of most other pilot bilingual programmes in Mexico – for assessing the applicability of Cummins' model: (1) locally and regionally, the indigenous language is more secure (e.g. virtually universal, and full native-speaker competence among children in San Isidro and Uringuitiro); (2) greater district and state-wide official support for a pluralistic and inclusionary language policy, including the production of professional quality school texts in P'urhepecha that far outstrip those available to most other Mexican ILs, reflecting, in turn; (3) a higher degree of awareness and ethnolinguistic identity, the preservation and revitalisation of the P'urhepecha language figuring among the important cultural projects at the community level and regionally as well.

In this case, the key research questions focus on the initial development of literacy and related academic abilities primarily through the medium of the indigenous language and subsequent and concurrent access to these 'underlying proficiencies' (i.e. represented mentally independently from the language which served as medium of their development) when presented with academic tasks in Spanish (the inverse scenario from the one examined in the Nahuatl-Spanish assessments in Tlaxcala).

### **Interdependence of L1 and L2 in a bilingual curriculum**

One of our points of departure then is that the concept of access to 'underlying proficiencies' applies fully to the situation of indigenous language bilingualism; that despite the sharp sociolinguistic imbalances and unequal distribution of resources, the IL can: (1) serve as the medium of development of academic discourse abilities, processing skills specific to literacy, and the concomitant development of metalinguistic awareness applied to the use of language in school, and (2) avail itself of these same proficiencies, shared in common, if they were originally developed through the medium of Spanish, or effect the same kind of sharing of cognitive resources if they were originally developed through the medium of an indigenous language. In the case of (1), the hypothesis that this project seeks to confirm is that in addition to the positive effect on IL development and revitalisation that IL-medium instruction would offer, the core proficiencies of literacy and academic discourse abilities would develop more robustly; and since they are not 'stored' in an IL-specific domain, they would be accessible to bilingual learners when literacy tasks are introduced in Spanish.

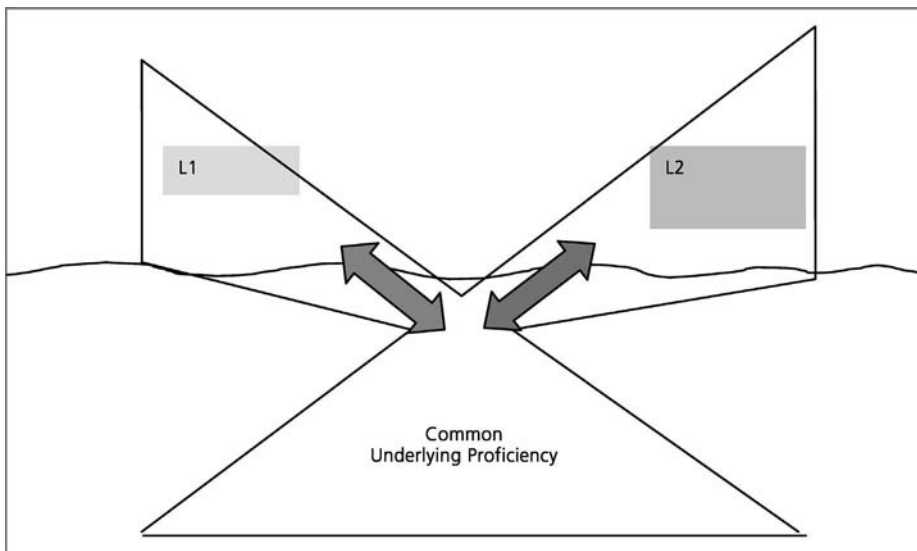
To reiterate, the core proficiencies in question are shared in common (accessible to bilinguals through the medium of their IL if they were acquired through the medium of the NL, or vice versa). Here, proponents of exclusive L2 instruction or national language-only instruction are under the obligation to bring forward evidence that such access would be significantly blocked in some way, or that there is some inherent impediment to the development of academic proficiencies through the medium of an indigenous language such as P'urhepecha or Nahuatl. Why, for example, would access to other types of discourse ability, of the non-academic kind that are also non-language-specific (e.g. pragmatic abilities and cultural knowledge related to skilled interpersonal

communication), be readily accessible to bilinguals but non-language-specific academic/literacy-related abilities not be?

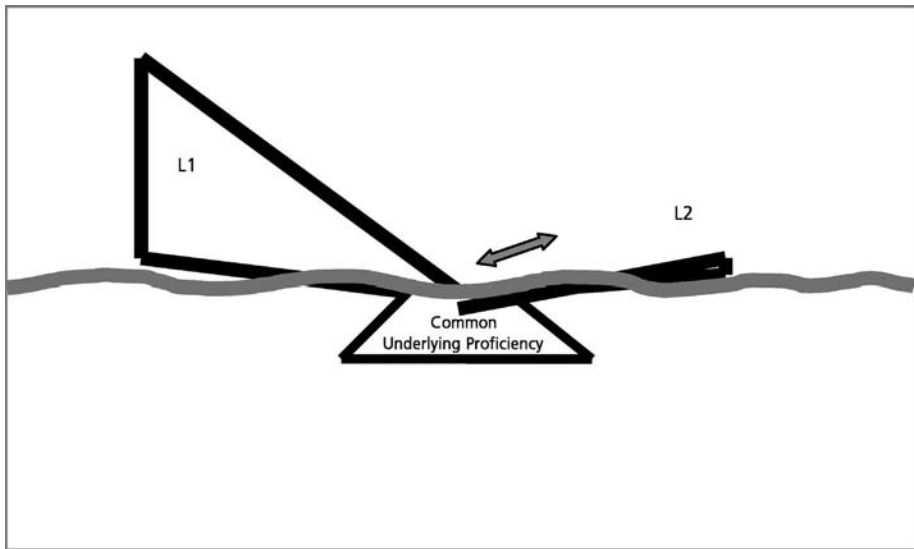
But clearly the possibility of access to the triplet of higher order discourse abilities, literacy-related processing skills, and metalinguistic awareness is not unrelated to linguistic competence. Their development in the case of a Spanish-speaking child who later learned P'urehepecha, for example, would imply that they are now accessible to him or her in the performance of tasks in *this* L2, not in the performance of tasks in a language he or she does not know. By the same token, the MT/L1 literacy development hypothesis (that there is a facilitative effect – hypothesis (3) from the previous section) would argue that building up a strong base in the academic proficiencies will be expedited for monolingual L2 beginning learners if reading texts, teacher instruction, and classroom interaction are fully comprehensible.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1 takes liberty with Cummins' model of bilingual proficiency to emphasize the idea that access to the cognitive domains of the CUP is open through the 'channel' of either L1 or L2, developed beyond a hypothetical minimal threshold. At the same time the conceptual, academic-related, components of the CUP develop through experience with higher-order uses of language. It matters little to these components, so to speak, through which channel this input is received. Whatever the sub-components, modules, and internal interfaces of CUP are composed of, they most likely do not resemble linguistic representations in the way they are structured: verb phrases, morphological patterns, phonological features, etc. of any language, Spanish and P'urhepecha included.

Figure 2 depicts the situation that many, if not most, children in San Isidro and Uringuitiro faced in the previous Spanish-only programme. In a cognitive



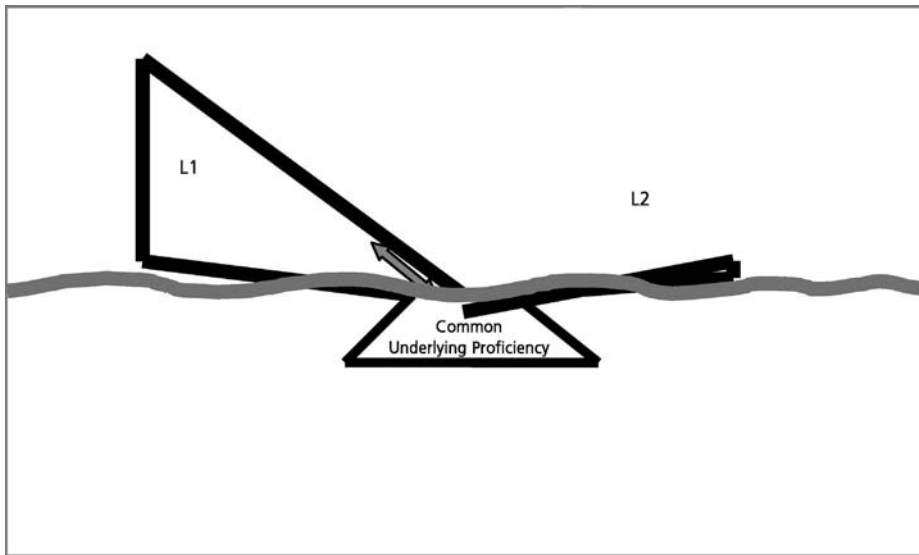
**Figure 1** Linguistic interdependence of L1 and L2 (based on Cummins, 1980, 2000)



**Figure 2** Failed Hispanicisation

system that is completely monolingual, with no measure of listening comprehension ability in the language of instruction (children's L2), L1 is left unexploited, and the conceptual structures that form the component parts of the academic abilities of the CUP either fail to develop in a normal robust way or advance with difficulty. The example of the many children that thrive on this kind of cognitive challenge speaks to a different question (interesting in its own right), but not central to the problems posed in this study. Granted, any kind of effective L2 instruction during the previous Spanish submersion regime was probably scarce and sporadic; but even under more favorable Spanish as a Second Language immersion conditions the channel between L2 and the CUP would not be as open as the potentially completely unobstructed channel connecting CUP with L1. For many children, whose only contact with Spanish was in school, we could even suggest that it was tightly sealed off.

In the final modified version of Cummins' double-iceberg model (Figure 3) the channel connecting language (now L1) and underlying proficiency is exploited such that CUP is provided with the input that it requires for the development of academic language abilities at a normal rate. In the medium term, and beginning even in the short term, as research from more favourable bilingual contexts has shown, the strong development of discourse abilities, information processing mechanisms, and metalinguistic awareness helps to leverage L2 learning. Comprehensible input in Spanish through rich immersion experiences (content-based L2 teaching in selected subjects), plus access to a strong CUP, work together to boost the learning of the national language that children need to learn. With time, the schema starts to resemble the ideal balance depicted in Figure 1.



**Figure 3** Successful literacy in L1, transfer to L2

In all of this, we need to keep in mind that literacy, academic achievement, and L2 Spanish learning are among the central considerations in the discussion among bilingual teachers and the families of San Isidro and Uringuitiro, but they are not the only ones. Looming prominently as well, as we already noted, is the question of on what terms will indigenous communities break down the historical isolation and marginalisation that still weighs down heavily upon them. All the evidence from several years of field work in this region of Michoacán state indicates that a complete and unidirectional assimilation into the national culture and a rapid subtractive bilingualism resulting in the erosion of their language represents an unacceptable prospect in the view of most community members. For now, it appears that a significant layer among them views the institutions of public schooling as an instrument of linguistic and cultural affirmation; and we will recall that utilisation of these material resources for the purpose preservation and revitalisation of an indigenous language is not inconsistent with official language policy in Mexico.

### **The Challenge of Teaching Spanish as a Second Language**

Among child language researchers working from all theoretical perspectives, the consensus is that primary language acquisition unfolds naturally and spontaneously without recourse to systematic instruction of any kind. In regard to second language learning, on the other hand, mounting evidence is beginning to suggest that even child L2 learners may not profit from simple immersion in the same way they did during the emergence of their L1. In fact this divergence from spontaneous and automatic L1 acquisition seems to apply, depending on the circumstances, even to elementary school-age children (Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003; Meisel, 2001; Schachter, 1996). Given the continuing



debate on this question in the research literature, it would not be surprising that project teachers had not identified L2 Spanish as a specific task requiring its own methods and special curriculum design. Even within the framework of strong 'naturalistic' approaches to second language teaching (which hold to the view that 'comprehensible input' and immersion are sufficient for acquiring the L2 grammar), an organised and systematic L2 teaching programme would still be necessary to implement because school-age child learners must develop proficiency in the second language for *academic purposes*.

In preparation for the series of 'classroom/workshop' seminars that were implemented during the 2003–2004 school year, strategies for teaching L2 Spanish were observed and catalogued. With the generalised recognition that this aspect of the bilingual programme was inadequate in a number of ways, the careful observation and study of classroom practices would lay the groundwork for a thorough self-critique. Two kinds of instructional discourse emerged as representative of how teachers and students worked with Spanish.

Firstly, reading to the class from content-area textbooks was one of the common practices. As such, second language educators recognise this approach as an effective strategy when students still lack the basic L2 grammar and literacy skills to read independently. With appropriate additional context support (much of it immediately available to students in their own copy on their desk), modifications in teacher speech and discourse, strategic redundancy, and ongoing comprehension checks, use of the standard or official textbook as a tool of second language teaching can be effective. Second language teaching is integrated into an academic content area subject; language learning is tied to concept learning. For teachers, the textbook serves as a useful script and content organiser; for students the text does the same as they follow along, decoding at whatever level they are able to. However, given students' rudimentary knowledge of Spanish, as a rule, most reading activities were devoid of comprehension. Typically, teachers would introduce the topic in P'urhepecha (in general not a bad way to evoke prior knowledge and build up pertinent background knowledge), and proceed to read aloud from the text, in Spanish. Noticing that students had not understood, a common practice would be to recapitulate, in L1, the material covered, translating terms and explaining new concepts that students could not understand in Spanish.

Another major component of Spanish instruction was a subject designated as 'Language'. In this class, teachers contrasted the structure, vocabulary and spelling of both languages, and developed a type of 'contrasting grammar' by promoting reflection on the differences between children's L1 and the language they were learning as a L2. This kind of development of metalinguistic awareness of similarities and differences between the languages children use in school surely has a place in a well-rounded bilingual programme. In the Tlaxcala study bilinguals as young as eight years showed a curious interest in these comparisons and contrasts. Perhaps because aspects of pronunciation and grammar when speaking Spanish (e.g. with an accent in the presence of monolingual Spanish speakers), and codeswitching and borrowing (from Spanish) when speaking in the indigenous language are such salient concerns in the community at large (Francis, 1998), children

might find this kind of reflection interesting. They may even be better at it than other children (an entirely speculative hypothesis, worthy of future study, nevertheless).

In regard to the practice of concurrent translation (in (1)), we have here another example of near universal consensus among second language teaching researchers. On the part of the learner, the expectation of receiving a L1 version of a L2 text or explanation almost guarantees that attention to the L2 input will be negligible. It also relieves teachers from the task of making modifications to L2 discourse or providing additional context support, making L2 input even less comprehensible, in turn diminishing the return on any effort, on everyone's part, to negotiate meaning in the target language. What is interesting, surely, is how it came to be at one time a common practice among bilingual educators generally, and why anecdotal reports from the field suggest that the practice persists (albeit driven 'underground' by vigilant bilingual teacher trainers and education college instructors). It is entirely possible that the project teachers in San Isidro and Uringuitiro also suspected that the practice of concurrent translation was entirely ineffective. In the absence of a deliberate and disciplined content-based L2 immersion methodology, one can easily imagine how translation of content becomes a default solution to the problem of comprehension when subjects are to be taught in the L2.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the concept of content-based second language instruction is not immediately intuitive; in addition, its implementation is not straightforward and easy to do for teachers for whom planning time is at a premium. Falling back into submersion-type classroom discourse is a constant threat on the horizon.

Promoting metalinguistic awareness of interlinguistic contrasts (activity (2)) is not without value; however, it tends to be divorced from the content-areas, and does not provide comprehensible input in the L2 or practice for students in using the L2 in communicative language use situations (it is not likely that teachers discussed these abstract topics with students in Spanish). In sum, the challenge before the project teachers consists of integrating second language learning into the content curriculum. Accomplishing this task in a way that content is comprehensible, at least in part, will at the same time transform their Spanish as a second language program into one that is highly communicative. This is the first step; the second involves integrating language and content in such a way that allows for reflection on grammatical patterns and a focus on form. From this point of view the class that teachers dubbed 'Language' was not completely off the mark. This aspect of second language teaching will come up in the next section.

### **Transforming the Curriculum Through Critical Action and Conscious Practice**

During the 2003–2004 school year, significant changes were implemented in the curriculum of San Isidro and Uringuitiro, which the staff of the second school had already partially anticipated during the previous school year. Together with the participating teachers, the research team developed a programme of Spanish as a second language instruction that would be viewed as an integral component of the overall bilingual school project.

A classroom/workshop concept was put into practice that is different from traditional in-service teacher training, following a dynamic of practice-analysis-theory-practice that advances in a type of 'spiral of knowledge'. All work is carried out in the schools, on site, for one week each month, throughout the school year. Mornings are devoted to observation and videotaping of classes; in the afternoon, researchers and teachers form workshops to analyse data that is presented for discussion. Teachers prepare new units, themes and materials for the next day, with the research team's support. Videotaped sample lessons from the morning are observed once more, discussed and critiqued. In this manner, the project is developing a new form of in-service training and curriculum preparation; the teachers themselves are the main actors in the process since we base our work on their practice, and their problems. Based on a collective analysis of observation data and sample classes, needs and requirements are defined, teaching techniques are tested, and new units and materials are designed.

At each weekly seminar, a specialist in the area of second language teaching, classroom ethnography, language learning, literacy, indigenous education, or assessment presents a workshop and demonstration, always based on the previous observation of teacher-student classroom interaction. The guiding principle for our work is that everything that is prepared and discussed in the afternoon is applied the following day, then observed and once again evaluated. This procedure attempts to overcome the traditional schism between training and operation, a fundamental defect of almost all major training programmes in Mexico which generally do not follow up on implementation or allow for feedback.

One of the primary objectives of the project is to counteract a rooted practice that, in our experience, increasingly separates the learning in workshops and courses from the commitment of putting knowledge into practice. In a single week, all participating teachers developed pedagogical innovations that normally take months of work. Teachers were able to begin to teach complete units in Spanish, without resorting to translation, while most of the students understood and accepted the rules of the game: everyone expects that during Spanish class, Spanish, and only Spanish, is the medium of instruction and everyone makes an effort to use the target language during this period. Three guiding principles form part of the new approach to L2 teaching.

### **Principle 1: Language distribution**

One of the initial changes we introduced was the creation of a domain reserved for Spanish in the curriculum. Students now have a daily Spanish class of approximately one hour. During the class, teachers use Spanish exclusively and stimulate students to do the same. As explained in the above section, teaching Spanish requires its own space. One of the interesting obstacles to the task of increasing the use of the target language in school that we have identified in these two particular indigenous elementary schools is related to the new relationship that has been established between students and teachers. Different from most indigenous schools in Mexico, since the implementation of the indigenous language based programme in 1995, P'urhepecha has become the unmarked language of conversation and classroom interaction, a major socio-linguistic asset that favours language maintenance and revalorisation.

However, this process had the effect that it became difficult for all participants to make the shift to using the target language of second language learning during 'Spanish time'. A 'school society' has been formed with the previously excluded language, which by all accounts should be viewed as an important conquest of the bilingual school project. But teachers and students now face the task of setting aside domains of language use specifically reserved for Spanish, a 'protected space' for the national language, as unusual as this might sound to the outside observer. Another way of thinking about the problem might be: how to apply the concept of diglossia to the confines of a school in which the former distribution rules have been overturned, and new ones have yet to stabilise. Expectations that correspond to a 'special diglossia' now could be applied as a conceptual framework for the purpose of serving a pedagogical purpose, that of language learning.

Two last clarifications regarding this idea are in order. The separation of language use and the conditions placed on translation, or even codeswitching,<sup>5</sup> apply differently to teachers and to students. A high standard of compartmentalisation is both attainable and recommended for teachers who are fully proficient in both languages. No such restriction need be (or should be) applied in a same strict fashion to second language learners. The discussion on the advisability of codeswitching on the part of teachers is one that we unfortunately must set aside for another occasion. In any case, its effect on the processing of second language input during instruction should not be equated to that of concurrent translation, the bilingual pragmatics of each corresponding to different communicative purposes.

### **Principle 2: Language learner sensitive discourse in Spanish**

Adjusting speech and discourse to the communicative needs of second language learners, providing more redundancy, making the introduction of new concepts easier to understand, and being sensitive to the special information processing constraints in an L2 does not come naturally to all teachers. Again, to avoid turning content-based second language immersion into what didn't work during the period of Spanish-only submersion, deliberate monitoring of this set of discourse features should be a part of teacher in-service reflection (López & Jung, 2003). One way perhaps to frame the problem would be to present these adjustments and modifications as an alternative to the past practice of concurrent translation. For further discussion on the question of modified input in L2 learning, see Gass (1997) and Long (1996).

### **Principle 3: Content-based language instruction**

The idea behind integrating language and content instruction is that the L2 is taught most effectively and most efficiently when meaning is infused into the work of language learning and students are offered multiple opportunities of actually using the L2 in meaningful ways. Aside from the obvious motivational upscale that should result when the focus shifts to actual academic content, the focus on grammar objectives also shifts toward those aspects of the L2 that students need most for academic purposes (Haley & Austin, 2004; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Wesche & Skehan, 2002). This last pedagogical feature of content-based language instruction is particularly useful in framing the

problem of L2 Spanish curriculum design for a community in which children have little contact with Spanish. It helps teachers prioritise what precisely about Spanish their students should learn in the short and medium term. If the priority is Spanish for *academic purposes*, then not all aspects of the linguistic competence typical of native speakers of the language need be designated as the minimal standard of achievement for all sixth grade students. An analogy from the world of adult bilingualism might be instructive. If, for example, a visitor from a foreign (non-Spanish-speaking) country came to visit a town in the Meseta Tarasca to give a presentation on a topic of interest to local teachers, it would not occur to anyone that he or she suffers from a learning disability or language deficit upon noticing a heavily accented speech and a high frequency of ungrammatical sentence construction. The general assumption would be that the L1 of this non-native L2 speaker is normal. The same can be safely assumed in the case of the bilingual middle school student of San Isidro whose L1 P'urhepecha has not been *replaced* by Spanish. In other words, for L2 learners not all of the sub-components of linguistic competence have a significant bearing on their academic performance; a good number have none at all, of any practical consequence. This guideline can now directly inform the setting of standards and the designing of an effective Spanish L2 programme. With most recent versions of the content-based language instruction model now calling for the inclusion of specific language learning objectives into the integrated language/content curriculum (Harley, 1998), the above prioritisation of grammar learning would be a good place to start.

The discussion of integrating language and content inevitably leads to an interesting dilemma that second language teachers face. If L2 learning does not proceed rapidly, as it usually does not, and especially if, because of sociolinguistic, economic-geographical, and historical factors, L2 development is prolonged over an even more extended period, teachers are faced with a problem: how to cover required material at a rate that keeps L2 learners reasonably on par with their native-speaking peers who do not require any special modifications in teaching methods? Part of the solution is to make content-based L2 teaching as efficient and effective as possible. In this sense we could say that second language learners in school have less time to squander on low-level non-academic activities, and suffer disproportionately from extended down-time and lost teaching opportunities. Another part of the solution is the one project teachers in San Isidro and Uringuitiro took upon themselves to implement; if at least some of the most context-reduced and cognitively-demanding academic milestones are to be attained through the medium of children's primary language, progress toward achieving them should be expedited. By exploiting the resources of the language children already know, and for which no special modifications are necessary during instruction, advances in these subject areas (reading and writing in particular) should be in evidence at a more rapid pace, developmentally on schedule, so to speak. In theory, attaining satisfactory levels of literacy in Spanish should be facilitated by the more robust initial development that would be given to the non-language-specific literacy skills through the medium of the primary language.

## A Bilingual Curriculum for Spanish Language Learners

In the long run, a programme of bilingual intercultural education<sup>6</sup> must demonstrate its capacity and efficiency in meeting the educational aspirations of the local community, which typically include broadening the opportunities for employment in non-traditional occupations and opening up access to higher education in the middle and high school levels. All of this implies, today, a significant upgrading of children's Spanish language abilities and literacy skills (that virtually without exception must be demonstrated in Spanish). A school project that does not address and resolve these basic challenges cannot subsist indefinitely; its curriculum, although well structured, becomes politically unviable if it does not chart a course for satisfactorily attaining the objectives of learning the national language. This challenge is being faced by a number of educational projects in Latin America, that have established, through great efforts and against formidable resistance, successful programmes that centre on teaching reading and writing in students' indigenous language, but without attaining satisfactory levels in Spanish. The proposal that we have attempted to outline in this report supports the hypothesis that the most effective and efficient instrument for attaining higher levels of achievement in literacy and Spanish as a second language is a bilingual intercultural curriculum – a curriculum designed to develop both languages in a coordinated manner.

As we suggested in the previous section, a good way to set a programme's sights on the question of ultimate attainment in Spanish is to frame it in terms of a *coordinated bilingualism* (rather than the notion of 'balanced bilingualism'). Speakers identify their levels of proficiency in each language and coordinate their use for communicative purposes. To what extent or how easily are child second language learners able to retain knowledge of their primary language, what level of proficiency can we expect them to attain in a second language if the primary language maintains 'native-speaker completeness', and what is the nature of language attrition and replacement under conditions of normal subtractive bilingualism, are questions that have not even been formulated adequately yet in the psycholinguistic research literature; see Singleton (2001) and Butler and Hakuta (2004) for a review. Thus, under the conditions of a continuing high level of indigenous language vitality and limited extracurricular contact with Spanish, we cannot assert with confidence that a given specific, measurable, level of Spanish proficiency could be attainable by the end of sixth grade if one language distribution model or another would be implemented across the six years of elementary school (L1-70%/L2-30%, L1-50%/L2-50%, L1-30%/L2-70%, etc.). However, considering that not all of the sub-components of proficiency in L2 Spanish develop at the same rate, and do not need to for the use of the language for academic purposes, a rationalised pedagogical prioritisation of certain aspects of the second language system should yield results in the domain of literacy, for example, that are at least comparable to that of children's peers regionally and nationally.

With the expansion of educational services in rural areas beyond the traditional expectation of primary grade completion, secondary schools must

now assume the responsibility of reckoning with the reality of multilingualism and intercultural communication in the classroom. Such an approach offers, in our view, a reasonable and responsible perspective on school language policy reform.

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### Notes

1. Within the framework of an agreement between DGEI and the Centro de Investigaciones Superiores del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (CIS-INAH), now the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios sobre Antropología Social (CIESAS), we developed various projects to evaluate different aspects of how indigenous education actually functions in the field, starting in 1979. In a study carried out in the Valle del Mezquital in Hidalgo state, we were able to make a first approximation toward analysing the main categories of the problem of the Hispanicisation programme in Mexico (Carrillo Avelar, 2004; Francis & Hamel, 1992; Hamel, 1983, 1988).
2. Interestingly, the controversy surrounding the concepts introduced by Cummins has yet to show any signs of convergence. Some authors seem to reject the validity of any distinction whatsoever between literacy-related academic language proficiency and context-embedded interpersonal conversational skill (e.g. Edelsky, 1996). Another approach related to this distinction makes reference to the differentiation between primary and secondary discourse (Gee, 1996); see Francis (2002) for a review of the debate. The notion of access to underlying proficiencies that are not language-bound would seem to hinge on accepting the concept that different kinds of language proficiency are subserved by different sets of knowledge structures. This kind of internal diversity of cognitive resources is reflected in the distinctions that Cummins proposed; simply put, not all examples of language ability are of the same type. For further discussion: Baker (2001), Cummins (2000), Hamel (2003, 2005).
3. To be fair, curriculum models that contemplate the exclusive use of children's L2 do not propose L2 submersion as an alternative to bilingual instruction (this would be an unfortunate caricature that would not serve the discussion). Rather, what is usually envisioned is a systematic second language teaching programme also based on the principles of content-based language instruction and modern, up-dated, immersion methodology. The hypothesis being advanced in this report is that it would be a mistake to extend the argument regarding the applicability of exclusive L2 immersion in many bilingual and multilingual contexts (which should not be denied) to the *different argument* that there is no difference in the learning circumstances that beginning L2 learners face and ultimate learning outcomes, across the board, between exclusive L2 immersion and bilingual instruction.

4. Such translation practices have been the most common approach in Mexican indigenous education since 1970, as is analysed in detail in Hamel (1988).
5. From our point of view the critical difference between classroom codeswitching and concurrent translation is that in the case of the former there is normally no systematic repetition of information for the benefit of students' comprehension. As such, it does not pose the same kind of problem in regard to focusing L2 learner's attention on target language input. A strict compartmentalisation of languages in bilingual instruction would perhaps also disallow codeswitching, but for different reasons. Other bilingual instructional models, while generally maintaining the same prohibition on concurrent translation might be neutral on the question of codeswitching (Francis & Reyhner, 2002; Jacobson & Faltis, 1990, for a general discussion of the different options).
6. The concept of 'interculturality', now central in the debates on indigenous education in almost all Latin American countries, was first defined and developed as an educational programme by Monsonyi and González (1975) in their work with the Arhuaco Indians in Venezuela. Faced with the dilemma of promoting cultural assimilation or native preservation of the indigenous culture, the authors opted for a third solution, and affirmed that 'interculturación seeks the maximum performance of the parties in cultural contact, avoiding as much as possible deculturation and the loss of ethnocultural values. [...] A programme of interculturación must be centered on the native language as a symbolic compendium of culture as totality' (Monsonyi & González, 1975: 308). Monsonyi and Rengifo (1983: 212) sustain that 'the starting point of bilingual intercultural education will be the languages and cultures of the respective ethnic groups, which will constitute the basic content and forms of the formal educational process. Added to these original elements – in a gradual manner, not conflictive or in substitution – are all thematic areas taken from the majority culture that the Indian pupil requires for an integral education ... as a symbolic compendium of their culture as a unit'.

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