Foreword

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Some twenty years ago, in a postgraduate teacher-training class, a student asked to speak with me privately, saying that she had a problem she wished to discuss. In the privacy of my office, she told me that she had been very lucky to have been hired to teach in a bilingual program, but that the program involved Spanish-speaking children; the problem, she said, was that she was bilingual in Arabic, not Spanish. What should she do? The actual resolution of her dilemma is not relevant to my argument; I make no claims to Solomonic wisdom. The argument, however, is that the educational system did the right thing (employing bilingual teachers) in a less effective way (failing to recognize that bilingualism is at best an ill-defined term and that the reality of bilingualism comes in many forms). It seems to me that such ironies are rampant in the educational system. Furthermore, it seems to me that these ironies tend to accumulate in language-teaching contexts more than in other academic contexts.

This book examines ironies of bilingualism. It shows that the act of teaching ESL/EFL is a highly politicized activity, politicized in the following relationships:

- teachers and students;
- students and students;
- students and parents;
- teachers and parents;
- schools and parents;
- teachers and teachers;
- teachers and administrators;
- administrators and the state;
- schools and communities;
- schools and society;
- languages and students, parents, teachers, administrators, schools, communities, and societies;
- teaching materials, curricula, and assessment instruments, and the individuals who create and buy and use such things;

- between any number of other pragmatic oppositions that mark the end of the twentieth century.

This volume discusses the marginalization of language teachers. To a certain extent, the marginalization of language teachers is their own fault (though I understand it is bad form to blame the victim). The absence of licensure for language teachers, the absence of evaluation of language programs, the deplorable quality of some language teacher-training curricula, the equally deplorable pay, and less than full-time employment (without benefits) of language teachers all constitute important aspects of the issue, but it is the willingness of teachers to accept (or perhaps their unwillingness to challenge) these conditions that results in the marginalization of teachers.

However, an issue not addressed in this volume is the marginalization of language teaching itself. ESL/EFL teachers are the offspring and heirs of foreign language departments and their policies (and, more recently, of English departments and their policies). Traditionally, these departments have viewed themselves as exponents of literary study; language teaching has historically been perceived as scut work, good enough to keep graduate students employed, but certainly not the concern of serious scholars. And the consequent focus on literary forms and literary language has defined what language teachers are expected to transmit. This focus is the outgrowth of assumptions about language learning—that language teaching is not a professional activity, that language learning is centered in acquiring the grammar of a language (i.e. language theory = grammar theory), and that language learning does not require much on-task time. These assumptions, further constrained by economic considerations, result in policies like that in California's "English Language Education for Children in Public Schools Initiative" (Proposition 227) enacted in 1998 (see Dicker, chapter 3).

Although this volume does not focus on the marginalization of language, what this volume does show is that virtually everything that happens with respect to curriculum, methods, teacher training, and language choices is heavily politicized and often based on conscious and subconscious bias. The following list contains 12 questions addressed in this volume about the teaching of language and myths that both educators and politicians often accept:

(1) *What language(s) will be taught in the public school system?*
Myth: language choice is driven by economic considerations; that is, languages that are thought to contribute to employability are taught.
Reality: several factors influence the choice of which language to teach—convenience, student numbers, teacher expertise, and available resources.

(2) *Who will be taught these languages?*
Myth: access to language education is democratically determined.
Reality: language access is largely restricted to the best students on the assumption that language learning (i.e. literary literacy) is an intellectual exercise and therefore should be limited only to the best and the brightest.

(3) *Who will teach these languages?*
Myth: any competent speaker with appropriate training is eligible to teach.
Reality: Schools favor native speakers (however they may be defined), and some native speakers are employed without reference to appropriate training.

(4) *Who will train the teachers?*
Myth: existing schools are competent.
Reality: many schools are not competent, which may explain the less than mediocre outcomes in language curricula.

(5) *When will these languages be taught—that is, at what point in the curriculum will the languages be introduced and at what point will instruction cease?*
Myth: languages should be introduced in middle school and continued for a maximum of two school years.
Reality: significant research suggests the adolescent years may be the worst possible time to introduce language learning. Furthermore, full competence takes many years to develop. One size does not fit all.

(6) *Where will these languages be taught?*
Myth: the only appropriate place for teaching to occur is in the formal classroom.
Reality: learners need contact with authentic communities of speakers.

(7) *How will success be determined?*
Myth: "standardized" tests determine proficiency.
Reality: the very existence of "standardized" tests is in question, and, whatever such tests may measure, it is certainly not communicative competence but is, on the contrary, likely to include only grammar and vocabulary.

(8) *What is the best methodology for teaching these languages?*
Myth: a "best" methodology exists.
Reality: the language-teaching field is more beset by fads than perhaps any other area of education. The "best" methodology changes at incredibly frequent intervals, depending on which charismatic "scholar" happens to have drawn attention to him or herself lately.

(9) *What are the best materials for teaching these languages?*
Myth: a single set of materials will be equally effective for all learners.

Reality: the set of materials is often identified by the strength of the advertising campaign mounted by a publisher, or by that same charismatic scholar who happens to have a set of wonderful materials in his pocket. In any case, rarely do teachers get to choose their materials; rather, yet another bureaucracy selects materials.

(10) *What sorts of auxiliary materials best support learning these languages?*
Myth: individual schools have the resources to purchase whatever auxiliary materials they wish.
Reality: schools have budget constraints.

(11) *Who will pay for appropriate language learning?*
Myth: districts and states will pay.
Reality: districts and states are strapped for funds and are quite likely to reduce funding for language teaching (see California Proposition 227) because language learning is not "jazzy," may be perceived as "effeminate" (clear evidence suggests that far more girls than boys undertake language study; see Baldauf & Rainbow, 1996), and may also be perceived as irrelevant in the face of serious academic work like science and mathematics (or less serious but jazzier "subjects" like football).

(12) *How will it be determined that language teaching programs are doing a satisfactory job?*
Myth: if a program survives, it is successful.
Reality: survival depends on a range of variables unrelated to any known educational criteria.

The answers to all these questions are politically determined, those answers being essentially insensitive to pedagogical considerations or theoretical views. This mythology is centered in beliefs about language and language learning.

Many countries value their native language as one being worthy to be taught in schools. In the United States, for example, there is a fundamental belief that English, being a world language, is preferred for any intellectual activity. The political linkage between language and the state—between language and national identity, between language and national unity—lies at the core of this belief.

Language teaching has its historical roots in the teaching of classical languages (i.e. Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Sanskrit). But those are dead languages, devoid of any community of speakers. The objective of study in those languages was to achieve an understanding of the thought and art of dead civilizations. Consequently, communicative competence was rarely the goal; rather the goal resided in an understanding of the grammar and vocabulary of those languages as a means to access the thought and art. For that goal, the grammar-translation approach was

ideal; translation constituted a viable teaching methodology. Although the teaching of classical languages is (most regrettably) in decline, the methodology is alive and well and widely practiced around the world (where assessment often drives curriculum) for the teaching of modern languages.

Although research suggests that something like a continuous exposure of at least 1000 hours is required to achieve any sort of competence, and further that the 1000 hours must be administered over a duration not so great that the rate of forgetting exceeds the rate of learning, there are few language curricula anywhere in the world that approach the 1000-hour minimum. On the contrary, language classes tend to be large (an average of 50 students per class), classes tend to meet for three 50-minute class hours per week for the average 35 weeks of the academic year, and the curricular limit tends to be 2 years. In a class of 50 students, then, each student gets roughly the equivalent of 1 minute of useful instruction in every 50 minute period. If one does the arithmetic (1 minute/period x 3 period/week x 35 weeks/academic year x 2 academic years = 210 minutes [or a total of 3.5 hours total exposure—an average of 1.75 hours per academic year]), it will take about 541.5 years to reach the 1000-hour minimum—a duration in which the rate of forgetting is quite likely to exceed the rate of learning.

Who is making all these bad policy decisions? Ministries of Education (or whatever such bodies may be called in any given setting) make many decisions. But Ministries of Education are not evil; they are not involved in some global conspiracy to deprive students of adequate language education. Ministries of Education must operate within budgetary and social constraints established by legislatures. The reality is that neither budgets nor curricula are endlessly permeable. If money is spent on language education, then some other curricular area goes begging, and if curricular time is expended on language education, then some other curricular area enjoys less curricular time. The relative intensity of protest depends on whose ox is being gored. For example, a professor of history at Melbourne University, in Australia, wrote in a newspaper article (*Weekend Australian*, 1 March 1997):

> The pressure on schools to teach drug education, physical education and languages has meant history has been de-emphasized to such an extent that it's now more important to study a foreign language than to learn about your own country.

Why do legislatures impose such unrealistic constraints on education, particularly language education? Legislatures are merely ignorant and subject to all sorts of popular misperceptions about language. Kaplan

and Baldauf (1997: 3) develop the metaphor that language education is like sex:

> Language issues have some of the characteristics of sex—everyone does it, and consequently everyone is an expert. However, it is not teachers nor even parents who teach most adolescents about sex; rather, it is a cadre of other adolescents, mostly characterized by knowing little about the matter. From there on, it is largely a matter of on-the-job training. It is not until one reaches maturity that one even discovers that there are real experts who might teach one something about the subject. So it is with language issues. Every segment of society has language and individuals competently use language for a variety of purposes. However, when users engage in talking about language—which they frequently do—that talk is largely marked by profound ignorance.

And so it is with legislatures and Ministries of Education, which are, after all, made up of fallible men and women characterized by the prevailing ignorance.

For much of human history, the relative ignorance of legislatures and Education Ministries hardly mattered. Few people went to school; the social requirements for "success" were more limited, and the influence of particular educational structures was geographically limited. But as the human population has increased, the stakes for success have escalated. As globalization has permeated educational structures (e.g. the European Community), the silliness of decision-makers has come to acquire vast significance.

In the final analysis, what this volume recommends is a dramatic re-education of all those who make decisions about language—from students, to parents and teachers, to materials and test writers, to administrators, to Education Ministries, to legislatures. Just as societies are painfully learning that the rape of natural resources has a huge cost, so they must learn that the destruction of human resources has an equally painful outcome. Just as societies have had to learn about ecological structures—how the demise of a species affects the lives of other species in a widening gyre—so they must now learn that languages too exist in an ecological structure, and that the death of a language is not a trivial event.

Although this re-education must take place in administrations and legislatures as well as in academics, Christison and Stoller (1997) have attempted to offer guidance to administrators in the field, without necessarily raising the political issues. The American Council on Education (1982) has attempted to address institutional policy. TESOL (1984, 1986)

has addressed internal standards for language programs. Indeed, there is a substantial literature on the problems and solutions, though not often on the causes. Unfortunately, it is not teachers (or even Education Ministries) who are at fault. The United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), for example, enforces regulations enacted by the U.S. Congress which specify who may enter the country under what conditions (including language conditions). The United States Information Agency (USIA) operates programs based in other countries and promulgates the policies that dictate answers to the dozen questions raised above. The U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and dozens of other governmental agencies are involved—indeed, agencies in every cabinet department are involved to some extent. But then so are other countries in the English-speaking world—e.g. Britain's Overseas Development Administration [ODA], the British Council, the Australian Overseas Service Bureau [OSB], the Australian Agency for International Development [AusAID], the Canadian International Development Agency [CIDA], and even some agencies of nations where English is not the first language.

It would be quite impossible in this brief foreword to enumerate all the governmental agencies involved or to specify in detail all the assumptions about language and language learning that dominate their policies. And this listing essentially ignores the myriad state agencies, school district agencies, and county and city agencies that all play a role in policy determination in the U.S. Among the darkness of the "English Only" movement and the destruction resulting from the hegemony of English, there is a faint ray of hope. The Center for Applied Linguistics together with the National Foreign Language Center cosponsored the first national conference on Heritage Languages in America, 14–16 October 1999, at California State University, Long Beach, as part of the Heritage Language Initiative, intended

> to overcome [the] neglect of heritage languages ... to help the U.S. education system recognize and develop the heritage language resources of this country as part of a larger effort to educate citizens who can function professionally in English and other languages. (Brecht & Ingold, 1998)

Wisely, this volume starts the re-education process with an essentially captive audience: students and language teachers. If the next generation of language teachers is better informed about what it is doing, and if it has learned to gather itself up to speak against egregious foolishness among its administrative superiors (see Forman & Scheraga, this volume), much can be accomplished. But, I fear, it will take more than talking to

teachers to address the re-education of the population. The contributors and editors of this volume are to be congratulated on their courage; it is not always wise to rock the boat. But until individuals of the caliber of the contributors to this volume can speak to Education Ministries and legislatures, success is likely to be limited and may require years to penetrate the layers of bureaucracy and ignorance that interpose themselves between students and their teachers.