

Introduction

Anne-Marie de Mejía

Universidad del Valle, Cali, Colombia

The development of bilingual education in South America can be traced back to the arrival of the Spanish and Portuguese colonisers in the 15th and 16th centuries, when Catholic missionaries began their evangelisation of the indigeneous peoples using local vernaculars, as well as Latin, Spanish and Portuguese. An official policy of compulsory Castilianisation in much of the area under Spanish control meant that in the 17th century, children of the wealthy elites attended schools where they developed literacy in the dominant colonial language. In addition, there were attempts to institutionalise the use of Spanish as the language of education in the Amerindian communities (see García, and de Mejía, this volume). More recently, however, in the 19th and 20th centuries, there have been moves to revalue bilingual education, both as a means of providing students with access to wider educational, cultural and business opportunities, and also as a way of reaffirming cultural identity.

Traditionally in South America, as elsewhere, debate on bilingual education has been conducted in two separate arenas. On the one hand, there is the work carried out in majority contexts, generally involving international languages, such as English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. On the other, there are ethnic minority, community-based bilingual projects aimed at maintaining and enriching the use of native Amerindian languages, such as Quechua, Kaxinawá and Ika, or minority languages, such as the different national Sign Languages of the South American Deaf communities, as well as providing access to the dominant languages used in the different societies. In this publication, studies on bilingual education carried out in both majority and minority language contexts have been included in order to provide the reader with an integrated perspective on the issues raised in relation to bilingualism and bilingual education in the sub-continent, and to try to bridge the divide between the different traditions.

This Special Issue is thus devoted to examining aspects of bilingual education and bilingualism in six South American nations: three Andean countries (Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia) and three 'Southern Cone' nations (Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay). The languages discussed include Quechua (Quichua) and Guaraní, as well as Brazilian Sign Language, Spanish, Portuguese and English. The contributors bring a considerable depth of expertise to bear on these topics. Some of them (King, García, Skliar, Muller Quadros, de Mejía, Banfi and Day) have adopted wide-ranging linguistic and historical survey perspectives, where they discuss general tendencies across different national settings (King) or within individual countries. These enable the reader to gain a sense of some of the main issues at stake in the field of bilingual education in this part of the world. Others (Spezzini, Simpson and Ordoñez) provide more specific, field-based visions, focused on student attainment in both oracy and literacy in different bilingual contexts. All the articles included in this Special Issue were written specifically for this volume.

The first paper, by Kendall King, sets the tone for the whole collection. The

author argues for the adoption of an enrichment model of bilingual education as a way forward for both minority and majority programmes in the Andean region. She incorporates insights derived from a particular research context, the Indian community of Saraguro in Ecuador, as evidence that localised language planning decisions, such as developing programmes to teach Quichua as a second language to community children, can be effective in equalising opportunities for groups which have been traditionally marginalised, as well as helping to maintain linguistic and cultural diversity across the whole region.

The focus on indigenous bilingual education is continued in Maria Elena García's paper on the development of bilingual intercultural education in Peru. The author situates her discussion on linguistic and cultural issues within a historical perspective, starting from the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century, and traces the development of experimental bilingual projects in the country from the 1940s onwards. She then goes on to discuss the high profile given to Intercultural Bilingual Education since the 1990s, making reference both to the differing discourses of indigenous activist groups, who are interested in highlighting the particular needs of the indigenous communities as culturally and ethnically autonomous groups, and also addressing governmental concerns about the inclusion of these communities within the Peruvian nation.

The third paper in this volume discusses a different minority context, the situation of Deaf bilingual education in the South of Brazil. The authors analyse recent changes in the representation of both Deafness and Deaf people in the country, which move away from oralist conceptions towards a recognition of the importance of a bilingual focus, involving Brazilian Sign Language and Brazilian Portuguese, in the construction of Deaf identity. They argue that Deaf adults have an essential role to play in this process and cite evidence of initiatives designed to involve the different actors, both Deaf and hearing, in the promotion and consciousness-raising of Deaf Culture and Education in the country.

The next paper is focused on bilingual education in Colombia and makes a case for the adoption of an integrated approach towards the two differing traditions of bilingual provision in the country – Ethnoeducation programmes for ethnic minority groups, and bilingual programmes for learners of majority languages. After a brief historical survey of developments in both traditions, the author discusses in more detail the situation of majority bilingual education, considering some of the factors which have influenced the successful spread of this type of programme in Colombia in recent years. She ends by indicating areas of convergence between the two traditions as ways forward for the future.

A second survey-type paper, this time focused on bilingual schools in Argentina, discusses the development of this type of educational provision from its beginnings in the early 19th century. After a consideration of similarities and differences within a wide range of *colegios bilingües* currently available, Banfi and Day chart their origins from Heritage or Community schools founded for the needs of particular immigrant communities, to Dual Language type programmes catering mainly for monolingual Spanish speakers. The authors conclude that in spite of a perception that Argentine bilingual schools form a homogeneous group, they are, in fact, highly diversified, and have not, as yet, been studied systematically.

The last three papers in this collection are based on research studies carried

out in bilingual schools in Paraguay, Ecuador and Colombia. In the first of these, Susan Spezzini analyses processes and patterns of language use by 12th grade students in a dual language (English–Spanish), American overseas school in Asunción, Paraguay. She comes to the conclusion that the linguistic ecology of immersion schooling represented in this context is based on complex interrelationships and interdependencies, where affective factors, learning opportunities provided by the specific language learning context, as well as the students' own investment in their learning contribute to successful bilingual development. The author argues, however, that the diglossic nature of immersion classrooms may hinder student acquisition of a range of different registers in their two languages.

The following paper is based on research carried out on narratives in Spanish and English written by first grade students in a bilingual school in Quito, Ecuador. Based on a T-unit analysis, the author examines differing writing styles and evidence of their transfer from the foreign to the native language in these productions. She concludes that while there is evidence that the children had similar syntactic ability in both languages, the types of errors observed in the two languages were very different. Moreover, the 'elaborate style' of writing characteristic of native Spanish speakers was absent in the children's narratives. The author recommends the carrying out of longitudinal comparative studies on students' biliterate development in other South American bilingual schools.

The final article in the Special Issue is also concerned with bilingual (English–Spanish) narratives, this time in oral mode. Claudia Ordoñez looks at the oral narrative proficiency of a group of 15-year-old adolescents at a bilingual school in Colombia, in order to ascertain the range and level of variability in their productions. She also compares these bilingual narratives to monolingual productions by comparable students in English and in Spanish. In a potentially worrying conclusion, the author shows that while the bilingual narratives exhibit a similar level of variability to monolingual stories, they also provide evidence of underdevelopment and limitation in narrative complexity in both languages. The author thus calls for more research to be carried out to discover whether this is a result of the introduction of bilingual education programmes at an early age in the country.

Although some of the contributors express certain reservations about aspects of the bilingual programmes they have researched in general, it may be said that the papers included in this publication focus on an additive and/or enrichment view of bilingualism and assess contributions from specific programmes within this general viewpoint. Thus, individual weaknesses or programme deficiencies alluded to should be taken as offering possibilities for further investigation and future improvement.

