Reflections on Bilingual Education, the National English Program, and the (Re)shaping of Language Education Policy in Mexico

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Language Policy in Multilingual Mexico
Host: University of Southampton – June 20-21, 2023
OSU Land Acknowledgement:
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Slides and reference links

u.osu.edu/sayer.32
Locating my work

• Former English teacher and teacher educator in Mexico
• Coordinator of Ohio State PhD program in Multilingual Language Education
• Director of Buckeye Language Education Resource Center
• Past editor of the TESOL Journal
• Fulbright Scholar (Mexico, 2011-12)
Outline of talk

• Timeline of English language education in Mexico
• Shift in goals for English language education policy: elite bilingualism to macroacquisition
• An ethnographic look at two language lessons
• Interrogating the discourse of “English Opens Doors”: Does English really change the equation?
English language education in Mexico

Historically, private “bilingual” elementary schools for elite socioeconomic status

2009: English made part of national curriculum, high school graduate B2 level

Bilingual elementary school in Durango, Mexico, founded in 1954

Elite bilingualism

Macroacquisitrion
Google image search: “Escuela Bilingüe México”

Ideologies of English in Mexico

• English indexes both:
  • “English opens doors” = opportunities and socioeconomic mobility
• Ideologies of US imperialism, malinchismo, pochoism
• Social class and raciolinguistic ideologies

Zócalo in Oaxaca in 2006 during the APPO Movement
English language education in Mexico

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Bilingual elementary school in Durango, Mexico, founded in 1954

Macroacquisitirion
La expansión del inglés en la primaria pública: Una tendencia global

“More & earlier” = desarrollo económico

- “Paises en vías de desarrollo”
  - Modernización del sistema educativo
  - Incrementar competividad en el mercado global
“El inglés te abre muchas puertas”

Chile: English Opens Doors Programme

English = idioma de oportunidad y mobilidad socioeconómica

Niño-Murcia (2003) ideología lingüística en Perú: “English as the dollar”
Antecedentes del inglés en la educación en México

• 1955: Se incluyen tres años de inglés en la secundaria pública
• 1980s-2000s: Expansión significativa de las escuelas privadas “bilingües”
• 1990s: Varias universidades establecen licenciaturas en enseñanza del inglés
• 2000s: 21 estados inician programas de inglés en primarias
• 2009: Secretaría de Educación Pública arranca el PNIEB
• 2014: Vuelve Programa Nacional de Inglés PRONI
Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2007-2012

1. La sociedad contemporánea, regida de manera preponderante por las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación (TIC), demanda ciudadanos que cuenten con las competencias necesarias para insertarse en un mundo globalizado. (Pág. 11)

2. Propone [el programa de inglés] como una medida para reducir la disparidad en la calidad entre escuelas privadas y públicas. (Pág. 11)
MAPA CURRICULAR DE LA EDUCACIÓN BÁSICA 2011

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1 Estándares Curriculares de Español, Matemáticas, Ciencias, Segundo Lenguaje Inglés, y Habilidades Digitales.
2 Para los alumnos hablantes de lenguas indígenas, el Español y el Inglés son considerados como segundas lenguas a la matemática. Inglés está en proceso de gestación.
3 Fomentar aprendizaje de Tecnología.
4 Establecen acuerdos formativos con Ciencias Naturales, Geografía e Historia.
Progression defined in terms of the Common European Framework of Reference.

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“[El programa tiene como objetivo] lograr que, al concluir su educación secundaria, los alumnos hayan desarrollado las competencias plurilingüe y pluricultural que requieren para enfrentar con éxito los desafíos comunicativos del mundo globalizado, construir una visión amplia de la diversidad lingüística y cultural a nivel global, y respetar su propia cultura y la de los demás.” (Pág. 8-9)

_Fundamentos Curriculares, Segunda Lengua: Inglés_
Ministry of Education, 2011
Implementación del PRONI

• 2009-2016 Expansión o generalización del programa
• 2012-15 Mayoria de los maestros sin contrato regular, cierra el programas en varios estados
• 2017 Alcanza una coberatura de ~25%
  • oferta concentrada en zonas urbanas
  • varía en cada estado del 100% al 2%
  • casi nulo en zonas indígenas

Clase de inglés en 4o grado en Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas 2011
Impact study of L2 program

Theoretical framework

Research questions

Data sources and collection methods

Data analysis

Educational and social effects of the PRONI broadly conceived

Align with PRONI sociocultural curriculum: ACTFL 5 Cs framework

Privilege participants’ experiences and perspectives

Grounded approach

Findings & implications

Inform curriculum & teacher professional development

See: Sayer, Ban & López de Anda (2017)
An impact study of early language education programs: Design principles

- Ethnographic perspective
- Multiple stakeholders
- Connect with social practices
- Cross-curriculum (“crosscutting concepts” Llosa)
- Multiple data sources

Interviewing an English teacher
Interviewing middle school students studying English in public schools, Aguascalientes, March 2014
Focused questions: Early english programs in public schools

Porque se ve que está hablando inglés
Because it looks like she's speaking English
Types of data

- **Primary source:** Ethnographic interviews
- Secondary source: Classroom observations
- Secondary source: Documents (lesson plans, student work)

Qualitative research: **Triangulation** of data across different sources
Lesson 1: Escuela “Las Lomas”
When we use an auxiliar[y] verb [...] the adverb is placed between the auxiliary and the main verb. This is also true for TO BE.

Subject + auxiliary + adverbs + main verbs
Lesson 1: Escuela “Las Lomas”

Peter: Now that students are coming to middle school having studied six years in elementary, and they are supposed to have a higher level, how has this affected your teaching?

Teacher: Well, the problem is that even when they get here [middle school], they still lack many of the elements. Some don’t remember what a verb is, what an adjective is, so I have to go step by step again...
Lesson 2: Escuela “Jardines”
Sayer | Language Policy in Multilingual Mexico 2023

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**Lesson 2: Escuela “Jardines”**

Victor and Julian. 12 years old. 7th grade. Presentation of a memorized dialogue students have created.

Victor: *Hi. What’s your name?*
Julian: *My name is Julian. What’s yours?*
Victor: *My name is Victor. Do you wanna be my friend?*
Julian: *Maybe. Do you like to play soccer?*
Victor: *Yes, I like to play soccer every day.*
Julian: *Great, let’s go to park Jardines to play.*
Victor: *Okay, what’s your cell number?*
Julian: *It’s 55-22-45-97*
Victor: *Great. I’ll send you a What’s Up.*
Contrasting teaching approaches

A middle school teacher compares her pedagogy in two different schools where she teaches 7th graders from the same textbook:

(Interview March 13, 2014)

01 Peter: So, speaking of those differences that you mention between those contexts [the two different schools where she works], so do you think you change your teaching approach when you’re here in this context or in the other [school]?
02 Teacher: Yes…
03 Peter: How’s that?
04 Teacher: Yes well for example, in this topic [from the class the researcher had just observed “expressing likes and dislikes”] I had explained how to express your likes, I gave them the elements, how to talk about what you don’t like, and they listened to a recording of a conversation and then I told them “now create a dialogue, talking about what you like.” So they chose the theme, they developed their dialogues however they wanted. And in the other school I had to just bring them the dialogue already completed [and they reproduced it].
05 Peter: Mmm…
06 Teacher: Because they can’t create one on their own.
07 Peter: Hmm…
08 Teacher: So yeah, it’s different.
09 Peter: So you’re saying that here, on his or her own the student can—
10 Teacher: —produce more—
11 Peter: —express their own meanings.
12 Teacher: Exactly. Yes.
13 Peter: And in the other context, it’s like you have to give it to them and do it for them.
14 Teacher: Mm-hm, yes.
Why does the “same” English lesson taught from the same curriculum look so different in Escuela Las Lomas and Escuela Jardines?
English in public schools: mobility or reproduction?

- Social stratification of math lessons
- English language education in Mexico
  - Working class public schools: Accurately reproduced scripted language and rules
  - Middle class public schools: Working within communicative guidelines to create own content
  - Upper class private schools: English as a medium of instruction using American textbooks
Social class and the hidden curriculum of work in English classes

- Analyzed how educational processes tend to reproduce socioeconomic structures

Jean Anyon (1941-2013)
*Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum*

Una maquiladora en México
Language education policy

• Elite bilingualism and the model of social reproduction

Workers don’t need linguistic skills

The manager needs linguistic skills (in English)
Grupo Modelo fábrica de cerveza en Coahuila, México, casi completamente automatizada
Aprende a ser un Agente de Call Center

Trabajar en un call center (centro de llamadas) es un empleo considerado por muchos como una manera de ahorrar para la universidad o como un paso dado hacia otros empleos. Si lo haces apropiadamente, este empleo te podrá ofrecer varias oportunidades profesionales.

Ten en cuenta lo que está involucrado en este empleo.

Reclutando agentes para un call center en la Ciudad de México
“Only 24% of 25-34 year old Mexicans have completed a baseline qualification at the upper secondary level, by far the lowest amongst OECD countries.”
(Hopkins, et al 2007)
“The Mexican education system is highly inefficient, incentives for improvement are weak and the quantity and quality of educational provision is well below OECD standards. In general the Mexican education system needs to rapidly improve human capital development.”

• PNIEB was introduced in Mexico as part of the educational reform.
• “Modernization” of public education is often tied to loan conditions set by the World Bank to align with broader neoliberal reforms.
PISA 2006

“The Mexican education system is highly inefficient, incentives for improvement are weak and the quantity and quality of educational provision is well below OECD standards. In general the Mexican education system needs to rapidly improve human capital development.”


Education = “human capital development”
Human Capital Theory

• Education = human capital development
• “Economists view education as an individual investment decision designed to achieve monetary return in the labor market.” (Becker, 1964)
• knowledge and skills acquired through educational investments increase human productivity enough to justify the costs incurred in acquiring them.
Human Capital Theory

**Commodification of language** (Heller, 2010)
Languages “transformed into symbolic capital as a key resource for economic exploitation” (Del Percio, Flubacher & Duchene, 2013)

*English = Language skill with value in the global market (linguistic capital)*

Education increases peoples ability to add value (productivity) → HCM

| Man | Skills & health | Incr MP of L | Incr profits | Incr wage |

Education increases peoples ability to add value (productivity) → HCM

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**Commodification of language** (Heller, 2010)
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*English = Language skill with value in the global market (linguistic capital)*
Where is the implementation of English education now?

1. Politicization and inconsistency of the implementation from state to state and across sexenios.

2. Plagued by administrative issues and the lack of basificación de los teachers.
Common challenges in implementation early English education policies

- Lack of educational infrastructure
- Shortage of qualified teachers who speak English
- Policies driven “top-down” from national ministry, no voices of local stakeholders
- Few resources committed to development of curricula, materials, teacher training
- Unequal access to quality L2 English instruction exacerbates social stratification?

- Argentina (Zappa-Hollman, 2007)
- Bangladesh (Hamid, 2010)
- Chile (Matear, 2008)
- China (Butler, 2013; Li, 2007)
- Colombia (de Mejia, 2004; Herazo & Jerez, 2012)
- Malaysia (Ali, Hamid & Moni, 2011)
- Mexico (Lopez, 2014; Ramirez & Sayer, 2014; Sayer, 2015)
- Vietnam (Hoa & Tuan, 2007; Nguyen, 2011)
A 4th grade class in Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas 2011
2nd graders doing a science experiment in Puebla, Puebla. 2012
A kindergarten lesson in Aguascalientes, Ags. 2015
Making puppets to do a puppet-show in English. Kindergarten in Pachuca, Hidalgo 2011
English teacher Ignacio Villalobos and his students in the Sierra mountains of Oaxaca, Mexico

Conclusions: Is the PRONI good language education policy?

Early English language programs in public schools are important…

• …for developing countries like Mexico in order for more citizens to have communicative competence in English to become more economically competitive in global marketplace.
• …because they support greater economic mobility and social egalitarianism.
• …because it is politically popular to support the discourse of “English=opportunities”
But...

- Students reported “non-academic” engagements with English
  - Music
  - Video games (including multiplayer on-line chats with “native” English speakers)
  - Facebook, What’s App, Snapchat with transnational family members in the U.S.
  - = So… students from a range of SES backgrounds do fairly comparable things with English in their everyday lives

- It’s unclear whether the English program in public primaries in Mexico opens any new doors for students.

- The pedagogical practices of ESOL lessons tend to reproduce social class differences.

- The differences seemed to be aligned with broader tendencies of aligning educational policies and pedagogies with the neoliberal goal of schooling as inculcating labor skills for human capital development.
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