



Teaching Foreign Languages: A Challenge to Ecuadorian Bilingual Intercultural Education

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ABSTRACT

Since the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights in 1996, there is a tendency not only to maintain linguistic and cultural diversity worldwide, but also to ease universal access to quality education which should comprise the learning of other languages and cultures and the generation of intercultural relations. In this sense, this article discusses the right that minoritized peoples in Ecuador have to learning other languages while reinforcing their own. After describing briefly the Ecuadorian main linguistic and educational policies in regards to the teaching of foreign languages, this article analyses the contrasting viewpoints of indigenous and non indigenous peoples towards the process of teaching-learning foreign languages. Finally, it offers some suggestions and general parameters related to foreign language teaching in the multilingual context of the study.

KEYWORDS: Ecuador, bilingual intercultural education, indigenous languages, Kichwa, Quichua, Quechua, foreign languages, language attitude, elite bilingualism, minoritized bilingualism, interculturality,

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I. INTRODUCTION

*Multilingualism is a resource to be cultivated,
rather than a problem to be overcome.*²

Based on the preceding statement, this article aims to bring to reflection the impact that the teaching of foreign languages (FL) has –or may have– in minoritized³ multilingual and multicultural environments which face the continuous imposition of hegemonic groups, their languages and cultures. After describing the context which surrounds the Ecuadorian society, as well as the official linguistic policy in regards to the teaching of FL in the country, I will analyze the attitudes and expectations Indians⁴ and Mestizos have in regards to the teaching-learning processes of FL. I shall proceed to present one of the experiences of the teaching of FL in the country, to then call upon reflection around the challenge involved in the search for educational plans and actions that prone to optimizing education, while at the same time reinforcing and maintaining local cultural and linguistic identities. Finally, and by way of a suggestion, I will transcribe some general ideas regarding methodological and content aspects, as well as teacher training for professionals teaching FL in minoritized contexts. Even though this paper is specially referred to the Ecuadorian reality, it is equally applicable to other countries in the Andean area, as well as to those characterized by multilingualism and multiculturalism.

II. THE ECUADORIAN CONTEXT

Ecuador is the smallest country in the Andes (272. 045 Km.²); it is located in northwestern South America (Map 1) and divided into four natural regions: the Amazonía, the Highlands (Sierra), the Coast, and the Galapagos Islands. Its population reaches approximately 13.000.000 people, divided into Indians, Afro-Ecuadorian, and Mestizos; a large group calls itself “white” while trying to deny its indigenous roots (Krainer 1999).

There is no agreement regarding the percentage of the indigenous population in Ecuador⁵; according to the ethnic census carried out in 1997 by the Confederation of Indigenous Nations of Ecuador (CONAIE), between 20 to 25% of the total population in the country acknowledge themselves as being indigenous coming from different nationalities (Map 1), and around two million inhabitants from the Highlands were registered as Kichwa speakers. Although demographic and linguistic data is not precise, it is a fact the Ecuadorian population is heterogeneous and our peoples have lived a history of conflict, in

² Adapted from Romaine's (1995: 7) original citation: *Bilingualism is a resource to be cultivated, rather than a problem to be overcome.*

³ Regarding some terminology used in this paper, I have chosen to use the word *minoritized* instead of minority, to underline the unbalanced sociolinguistic contact situation (and outcomes) in which dominant and subordinate relations are more important than numbers. For further reference, see King and Haboud 2002.

⁴ In this paper, the terms Indian(s) and indigenous are used interchangeably.

⁵ For information regarding census controversies related to the indigenous population, see Büttner 1992, Haboud 1999, 2003, 2006, Haboud in press, Krainer 1999, among others.

which minoritized sectors (i.e., indigenous peoples) have learned how to survive dominant sectors.

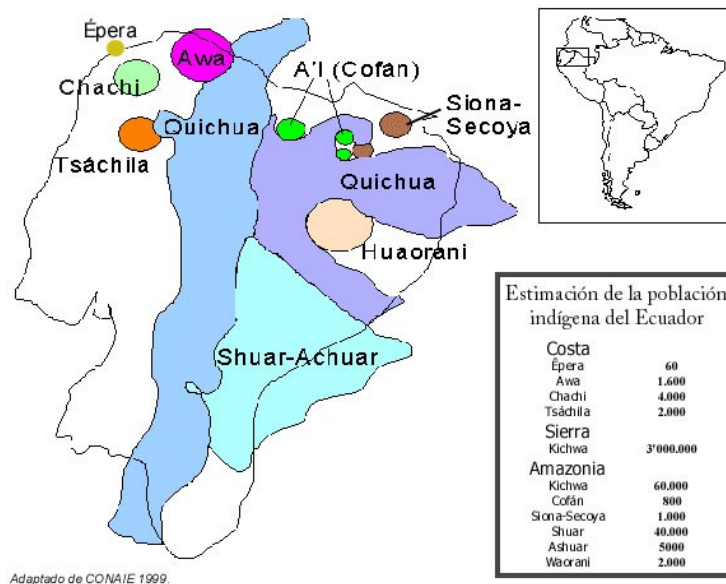


Figure 1. Indigenous Nationalities in Ecuador

Even though in the last few years several alternatives have been tried in the field of education, the non-indigenous population has been somewhat distant from such processes; therefore, it is understandable a marginal status has been assigned to all that is related to innovative proposals in the field of education, health, and the social agenda, as another way of ignoring cultures, their knowledge, their needs, the dynamics and values of groups that have historically lived in subordination. There has been a tendency to view diversity as inexistent, or to continue regarding groups that are not part of the dominant ranks in a romantic or paternalistic way. Nevertheless, we cannot say there is a real homogenizing tendency in the country. While minority peoples are demanded to follow the patterns of the dominant society, a real insertion is not conceived or allowed; hence, this gives rise to a static perception incapable of facing diversity and the challenges of multi-nationality, blinded to the existence of indigenous groups - although very alert and receptive to foreign groups and imported tendencies.

III. FOREIGN LANGUAGES, LINGUISTIC AND EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

III.1. FL for teachers

During the last thirty years, and until 1986, schools identified as “Normales” – Teacher Training colleges⁶, regarded the learning of a foreign language – preferably English or

⁶ In Ecuador, pedagogic schools were institutions which offered a teaching degree. Students with three years of secondary education were able to access these schools. They were generally separated by gender.

French- or of a native language, as part of the general education program. For 1990, post-secondary programs were established; these consisted in offering a two year specialization in the nursery school area. One of the subjects included in this post-secondary program was English. Superior Pedagogic Institutes were also established in the same year; these were intended to train teachers in three-year programs, and included the teaching of English as a foreign language.

Training of teachers in the bilingual intercultural educational system started in 1993 through the Intercultural Bilingual Pedagogic Institutes (IPIB), which offer a teaching specialization program starting in the last three years of secondary school, plus two additional years in post-secondary programs⁷. These centers teach both an indigenous language as well as English, although this is not included in the curriculum.

III.2. FL for students

Until 1992, English—and eventually some other foreign language such as French —has been a mandatory subject in secondary schools.

The Foreign Language Administration was established in 1992 under an agreement signed between the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) and the British Council. This project named CRADLE (*Curriculum Reform Aimed at the Development of the Learning of English*) (See Ministerio de Educación y Cultura 1997a, 1997b and UNESCO 2004), is the result of a bilateral technical cooperation agreement between the governments of Ecuador and the United Kingdom, for the curricular reform in the English area in public and semi-public schools in Ecuador. The main purpose of the CRADLE project is to grant secondary students firm basis in the handling of English, and thus offer them a starting point for their future. Development of the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing communicatively is attempted through a series of books adapted to the Ecuadorian reality. At the same time, this program provides teachers with technical assistance.

The National Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education (DINEIB), comments that so far, its institutions (i.e., primary and secondary schools Intercultural Bilingual Education program, has not benefited from the CRADLE project, as there is no official program for the teaching of English or any other foreign language for intercultural bilingual schools. Several DINEIB officials explain that, due to the flexibility of the bilingual intercultural curriculum, there would not be a problem in beginning classes in other languages, especially English, which is highly demanded among indigenous populations; some have already tried to incorporate the teaching of this language to the intercultural bilingual curriculum. I will further on refer to these experiences.

⁷ Ministerial Agreement No. 112 favors the application of the Model known as “System of Intercultural Bilingual Education” (MOSEIB), IPIB’s are part of this modal.

IV. BRIEF THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

IV.1. Bilingualism, diglossia, minoritized bilingualism

In this section I shall briefly discuss some concepts closely related to the topic of this study taking into consideration the fact that situations of linguistic contact, characterized by social inequalities, generate ethnic and socio-linguistic conflicts, stereotypes and attitudes which, in practice, have a bearing on linguistic-educational policies related to the teaching-learning of mother tongues, as well as on second and foreign languages.

If we compare Fishman's contributions (1972, 1989) with those of Ninyoles (1975) and several Latin Americanists (Moya 1995; Zimmerman 1995), it is clear that concepts of bilingualism and diglossia must be understood as dynamic processes modeled by social conflicts. Bilingualism basically implies the knowledge of two or more languages, and can both describe an individual or a group situation; meanwhile, diglossia –considered as a social phenomenon- is referred to the compartmentalized use of languages in specific linguistic areas.

The complexity of linguistic contact, which involves ethnic conflicts and social imbalance, demands finding a perspective that acknowledges both diglossia as well as bilingualism; that is, it seeks to understand not only the context of language use, but also its the social effects; this is, the situation of diglossic bilingualism where minoritized languages survive. This type of bilingualism describes both linguistic contact and the use of two or more languages (or varieties), as well as social tensions among which such contact is given.⁸ From this perspective, diglossic (unilateral) bilingualism is seen as the result of sociolinguistic conflicts generated in uneven social relationships. These, not only engender a permanent social imbalance, but also make intercultural relations more difficult to achieve.⁹

Although diglossic bilingualism is pertinent to describe the Ecuadorian situation in general, in this paper I would also like to analyze the case of languages which take (or should take) part in an educational process which includes the teaching of a foreign language. Generally, in Ecuador prestigious foreign languages such as English, French or German, are well accepted; meanwhile, national minoritized languages are clearly rejected. It is easy to deduce that those who speak the official language –Spanish-, and another language of prestige, shall be acknowledged as *elite bilingual* subjects; meanwhile, those who, in addition to the official language, speak an indigenous one –for example Kichwa- shall be considered as *minoritized bilinguals*. Consequently, *elite bilingualism* is regarded as a possibility of advancing towards modernity and is, therefore highly valued, while *minoritized bilingualism* is conceived as an obstacle for the development of the peoples, and a constraint for the participation in national socio-political and socio-cultural activities, and

⁸ For an analysis of this terminology see Kloss 1966, Moya 1995, Ninyoles 1975, among others.

⁹ For a more detailed discussion in regards to diglossic and conflict situations in Ecuador, Bolivia, and Guatemala see Moya 1995, López 1999 and Lewis 1994, respectively.

consequently, the target of negative and somewhat destructive attitudes. In the next section I shall discuss the attitude speakers have towards languages as well as its repercussions.

IV.2. Linguistic Attitude

Majorities that are deaf to their own injustice in the sphere of cultural democracy are equally deaf to their injustices of the system. (Edwards 1994: 56)

Attitude may be defined as the readiness to react favorably or unfavorably against a type of objects based on one's beliefs, experiences, and social and psychological prejudices (cf., Edwards 1994; Gugenberger 1995). Attitude is complex and multidimensional, and is therefore, difficult to analyze (Romaine 1995). There are disagreements between what people declare knowing, wanting or feeling, and what they actually do (knowledge, attitude, and practice); or, as Paulston (1994) states, between what one is and what one wishes to be.

A fundamental aspect in the teaching of languages in general, moreover of foreign languages in minoritized multilingual contexts, is the attitude individuals involved in the process have towards the language(s) in question, as it depends upon them the promoting of the acquisition of the language as well as its maintenance or loss.

Attitudes are intimately tied to symbolic or concrete functions assigned to a language. The first ones, which are closely related to the speakers' sense of belonging to a past and to an ethnic self-identification, are the ones that most commonly determine the speakers' willingness to preserve their native language; while the more tangible functions of a language, such as its instrumental use within specific domains (i.e., business, technical and scientific advances) lead people to feel the strong need to learn it. This area is so important for the teaching of foreign languages, that a whole field of "languages for specific purposes" has been developed; this precisely responds to punctual extra-linguistic needs of the speakers. It is suitable then to ask ourselves: what is the attitude and tendency of the indigenous and Mestizo populations towards the teaching-learning of foreign languages in the Ecuadorian minoritized multi-linguistic context? As we shall see below, this question acquires special importance in these moments when Ecuador has entered into an accelerated process of globalization and modernization.

V. FROM THE VOICES OF OUR PEOPLE

This section reproduces the voices of Indians and Mestizos who state their opinions, perceptions, and expectations in regards to the teaching-learning of a FL. Data comes from a brief survey informally conducted among professionals and university students in Quito between October and November 1997, as well as among teachers, Indian leaders and school students from several indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian Highlands. These conversations were carried on in several opportunities between 1992 and 1997, and in the summer of 2006.

V.1. The voice of the indigenous population

Thanks to sociolinguistic surveys¹⁰ conducted through the Intercultural Bilingual Education Project (PEBI), in 1992, 1993 and 1995, it was already noted that, due to “the increase of tourism in the last two decades, a great interest for the use of English has appeared in Ecuador, especially among indigenous groups dedicated to trade and commerce” (Haboud 1997:110). Subsequent studies have proven this interest has steadily increased. For example, in 2006, during a survey regarding ethno-linguistic attitudes in southern provinces of the Ecuadorian Highlands, several interviewees commented that English should be taught in bilingual Kichwa-Spanish schools in order to offer students better job opportunities at the national and the international levels. (cf., Haboud, in press; Ramirez 2007).

Likewise, and because of the researchers and missionaries who have made of indigenous communities their workplace, the indigenous population regards English as the language that could open doors to the world of technology and modernism: “from my point of view, English is the most important thing because technology is hot on our heels; computers, books, everything comes in English; imagine if we don’t prepare ourselves adequately we will continue falling behind...” (M.P., personal communication 11.20.97)¹¹.

However, this not only has to do with technology but also with the possibility of improving general life conditions without having to migrate. Representatives of the Sinchi Sacha Foundation who work on self-managed ecotouristic projects with Kichwa speaking individuals in northeastern Ecuador, assure there is a high demand of the indigenous population to learn English in order to be able to control their own resources: “... English and Spanish are not ornaments; they have turned into working instruments necessary for survival...”. This thought is continuously underlined by English teachers who work in rural areas: “... for many Mestizos, speaking other languages can merely be a way of showing off, or maybe a mandatory subject in their schools, but for my students here, it has become a real need.” (DC, 11.20.97).

In the perspective of interviewees who are part of new self-managed projects, minoritized peoples should have more and better educational opportunities as a way of “making justice” and of becoming respected by those sectors of the Ecuadorian population who historically have held power (C. Sosa, 10.23.97)¹²:

We have to make ourselves respected. If we don’t improve our economic situation and own what is ours, we will never move on. I believe that if we know other languages, we will work better, our place in this society will be improved and then, only then, the *mishus*¹³ will respect us...

¹⁰ For a detailed description of such surveys, see Haboud 1999, Ramirez 2007.

¹¹ Information in parentheses includes initials or names of the interviewees, as well as the date of the interview.

¹² I am indebted to Catalina Sosa (personal communication, 10.21.97) for her time devoted to describing the Sinchi Sacha foundation and the development of several self-funded projects in the Ecuadorian Amazonia.

¹³ *Mishu* from Kichwa = ‘mestizo’

One of the teachers¹⁴ from an indigenous school in Northern Ecuador, Cotacachi, comments on the importance of giving children quality education which may allow them to access higher educational levels as the Mestizo population. He also points out the need to get rid of devastating stereotype against Indian children:

[...] accepting several leaders' positive opinions, as well as those of the Cotacachi Major, a foreign language should be taught, especially English, beginning in Primary school; not only because childhood is the best stage to learn, but also because when (Indian) children go to school, they are in disadvantage with those children who have always studied in urban centers. It has always been known English and Math are the subjects that cause them most problems [...]. This is so, not because our children are not able to learn, but because they have not had the opportunity to do so [...] it would be positive if they were taught at a very early age, that is, 5 or 6 years. I believe what is important in this case is the age of acquisition...

Ramírez (2007) who developed a large study in six Kichwa-Spanish intercultural schools in Quito, also comments about the great interest to learn English students have, to the point that their parents are willing to hire private teachers in spite of their lack of resources.

We shall now contrast these opinions with those voiced by the Mestizo population.

V.2. From the voice of the Mestizo population

The main objective of the interviews conducted among the Mestizo population, was to analyze their viewpoint and disposition regarding the implementation of the teaching of foreign languages in minoritized groups in the country. We should underline the universe sampled was directly related to the field of language teaching. Many of their comments show they are reluctant to include a foreign language in the regular curriculum of indigenous schools, whether these belong to the Spanish system or to the intercultural bilingual system¹⁵: "I don't believe another language should be taught. Priority should be given to the teaching of Spanish (MAD, 11. 97).

It is really difficult to think that another foreign language should be taught at indigenous schools, as we know, they are trying to learn a practical language like Spanish in order to defend themselves in this society. Therefore, I don't believe French and English would be of any help for now... (MFD, 11. 97).

From the point of view of the interviewees, learning a foreign language would speed the process of loss of indigenous identity and languages:

¹⁴ I thank Dennis Cevallos (personal communication, 11.21.97) for sharing many of the concerns leaders and parents in the community had.

¹⁵ The indigenous population in the country may attend monolingual Spanish schools which are part of the Spanish Education Administration, or intercultural bilingual schools which are controlled by the National Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education.

Personally, I believe introducing the study of foreign languages [...] may be conflictive and could lead identity loss. I think we should currently concentrate on the issue of preserving their identity because original languages are being lost in our country. (VS, 11. 97).

Regarding the above citations, two aspects should be emphasized; on the one hand, it is interesting to note the interviewees show their strong desire to maintain local identities and languages, while the country's general tendency has historically headed towards homogenization; on the other hand, it seems minoritized populations are regarded as static entities with scarce possibilities to neither integrating new and even contradictory identities, nor of overcoming ethnic, cultural, and linguistic conflicts. We should not forget ethnicity needs to be regarded as a dynamic and creative entity, capable of constant redefinition and negotiation.¹⁶ It is vital to take into account these points of view when we face the great challenge of including new languages and pedagogical trends in the educational systems of our minoritized peoples.

It is also curious to realize learning foreign languages is not seen as a threat to Mestizo identity, but rather as a guarantee for the future. This is formally underlined by the CRADLE Project's national coordinators:

We support this process [...] because it offers students and teachers in the country a real opportunity for implementing a positive change in the quality of Ecuadorian education; the participation of the whole educational community in this development process is imperative for the benefit of the current generation as well as of future ones. (Ministerio de Educación y Cultura 1997b:3).

In 2005, the intercultural bilingual educational system, through the National Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education (DINEIB), expressed the need to include the teaching of English in their schools' curriculum. With the support of the US Embassy and of personnel specialized on curriculum, a series of thematic blocks was designed; these would facilitate the establishment of appropriate contents for the teaching of such language in multilingual contexts. Unfortunately, after the political changes occurred in the country in 1995, the project was left unfinished. At the moment, even though English is considered as an optional language, it is not taught and there is no curriculum designed for the effect. It is possible, comments Ramírez (personal communication, 02,02,07), that "in the near future requests and needs of our indigenous population, who demand quality education, will be attended."

However, as we have seen, so far, a large portion of the minoritized population in the country is left excluded from the educational community.

¹⁶ A detailed discussion of this subject can be found in Paulston (1994), who integrated two of the main perspectives related to ethnicity: (1) the circumstantial or interactive perspective, and (2) fundamentality. Also, for an analysis of these tendencies in regards to the Ecuadorian Kichwa population, see Haboud 2003.

A brief reflection of the ideas expressed by some of the interviewees, suggests that their reasons not to favor the teaching of FL to minoritized people, are mostly related to previous mestizo experiences as well as to preconceived ideas regarding the learning capacity of indigenous people. Their main concerns are summarized below:

1. The failure which the teaching of foreign languages has faced mainly in public schools around the country, due to a lack of organization, teaching materials, and trained teachers:

I don't think English should be included in the curriculum of indigenous schools, because the time that would be used for the teaching of a foreign language, could be used for a much wider teaching of Spanish and even Kichwa. If it were included, we will witness the same failure public schools have experienced... It is well known that our students, after twelve years of taking English, do not get to master the language, not even at a basic level (ED, 11.97).

2. The widespread belief that Indians do not understand the need to learn other languages due to the isolation in which they live. This, as we already mentioned, is totally opposed to the needs and expectations exposed by the indigenous people.
3. The belief that in the indigenous context, foreign languages do not have any functionality due to the population's dispersion and to the lack of community infrastructure; and
4. Non acceptance of the fact the indigenous population should have access to the same benefits as the dominant society. It is surprising some of the English teachers, as well as some who study languages, consider that implementing FL in rural areas is not only useless but has no theoretical support: "Tough accomplishing something like this in rural areas. We already face so many problems with the teaching of English in the city. I don't think it will be successful. Which, for example, is the theoretical support to implementing something like this?" (ML, 11.97)¹⁷.

Few of the interviewees viewed the teaching of a FL as something that could bring positive outcomes. They mentioned this could be a sort of compensation for some Indians confined to their communities, or a real linguistic, educational, and social empowerment:

I think it is a good idea to teach other languages to these people, because it is a way of learning about other cultures, especially because they may never leave their communities. (IM, 11.97).

It would be fine because Indians, as any other individual, have the right to acquire a foreign language –especially English- and thus achieve a better understanding of other cultures. Additionally, nowadays English and computing sciences are necessary to get a decent job. English, being an international language, would also help Indians to open international markets for their crafts... However, there

¹⁷ It is not clear if the interviewee is referring to theories related to language acquisition or to theories related to language teaching processes and methodology.

are also negative outcomes when learning about another culture; one is that indigenous cultures could be replaced by the American culture (AA, 11.97).

Finally, two interviewees commented it would be the minoritized population's responsibility to decide about the kind of education they want to develop: "... such a decision should be taken by the indigenous populations and not only by the educators. People must have a deep, authentic need to learn..." (MFD, 11.17.06).

These interviewees were deeply concerned about the implementation of programs which only respond to the snobbism of unemployed intellectuals, or to political campaigns: "It seems to me some intellectuals don't know what else to invent. Do you really think this is what the indigenous people really want? (ML, 10.97).

By way of a summary, I would like to underline the following:

1. The Ecuadorian society still displays a severe syndrome of diglossic bilingualism and "ethno-cultural diglossia" in which Mestizos and Indians live in permanent conflict. In spite of the visibility some Ecuadorian Minoritized groups have achieved in recent years, vis-à-vis the dominant society they are still confined to a static lower social position.
2. From the viewpoint of non-indigenous individuals, there is a tendency to believe the teaching of FL to minoritized groups is useless, unnecessary, and has no future.

This presupposition might be related to the idea that speakers of a FL have a status that does not meet the prestige assigned to an Indian by the hegemonic society.

3. In a diglossic society, like the Ecuadorian one, mastering foreign languages seems to have a double function: a symbolic and prestigious one for some of the Mestizos interviewed, and another concrete and practical for those Indians who regard a foreign language as a possibility of stepping out of subordination¹⁸.
4. The prestige assigned to different languages generates two types of bilingualism, a minoritized one which brings no pride, and a type of bilingualism called "elite bilingualism", which is prestigious and highly celebrated.

Several studies (cf., Hakuta 1984, 1986; Edwards 1994) have pointed out attitudes towards minoritized languages are modified when the political ideology changes. For example, recent variations in Bolivian politics have motivated the creation of new linguistic and educational policies. In such situations, one of the most commonly found difficulties is positioning the linguistic and educational situation within a broader social context, what seems yet to be a great difficulty in the Ecuadorian society. In spite of all these

¹⁸ In several surveys about linguistic attitude, conducted in urban areas starting since 1992, it has been noticed women tend to underline the importance English has for them as "the most profitable language for the future". In a still sexist society as the Ecuadorian one, it would seem foreign languages are conceived as an effective and fast way to leave subordination, be this due to gender, ethnic issues or "race". Undoubtedly this topic demands a more specific analysis.

contradictions, several rural and indigenous schools have incurred on their own in FL teaching experiences. I shall now refer to one of these experiences.¹⁹

VI. AN ONGOING EXPERIENCE: THE CHILDREN AND FAMILY CENTER

*There must be a future for our past...*²⁰

This phrase holds the prime objective of a comprehensive and quality education that founders of the “Children and Family Center”²¹ seek for their students. This institution has been working for the past twenty years in a rural area neighboring Quito, the capital of Ecuador. At the moment, it has around one hundred students divided between pre-school, primary, and secondary education. This school started with a nursery which aimed to help working mothers who migrated into this area in search of employment opportunities²².

When the elementary school started in 1992, it aimed “to recover the traditions, history, and collective art of the people related to the school [...]. Most of these were Quichua [...], and to give the children the opportunity of discovering other worlds”. Since then, Kichwa was taught, and sporadically some foreign language –English or French– depending upon the help of foreign volunteers. In 1997, the first year of secondary school began with more permanent programs in the teaching of English and another Ecuadorian indigenous language, Shuar (See Map 1), given that the school had Shuar speaking students. The goal was, and continues to be, to inspire an intercultural sense among all the school participants (i.e., students and teachers).

Schedules are flexible; activities vary according to the needs of the students and the presence of tutors, which continue being mostly foreign volunteers and students who have come to the country as part of academic agreements. Language classes are taught twice a week and the aim is to carry out intensive workshops each semester. In regards to materials, some already existing, such as tales, stories, videos, and more formal texts, are adapted and available at the small library for the children’s use. The main objective is to provide children with more tools to face the future by stimulating their self esteem and a collective and intercultural sense. This center want to go far beyond the learning of a language to seek the improvement in the quality of life and respect for the rights of minoritized peoples.

¹⁹ For the Ecuadorian case, it shall be important to evaluate, on the short term, if openness of the new government that adduces will work for the Indians, will have a real impact, not only in promoting the political participation of Indians, but also and above all, in promoting the academic improvement of minoritized peoples.

²⁰ Leo Núñez, Director of the “Children and Family Center” (personal communication 10.10.99; 01.07).

²¹ I am thankful to Leo and Aída Núñez, Renaud Neubauer, and Fernando Garcés, for sharing the information regarding this institution.

²² For detailed analysis of internal migratory processes in Ecuador, see Ayala Mora 1985; Corkill and Cubitt 1987.

This experience, as well as others which hold similar programs and expectations, have been a response to punctual needs as well as the result of individual efforts. Unfortunately, and in spite of all the efforts, different attempts to teach foreign languages in minoritized contexts face several difficulties, such as those of not having a curriculum, a lack of teachers and updated materials. Besides, as there is no linguistic-educational policy which envisages the teaching of a FL in indigenous schools, it is impossible to obtain official support and a budget to create permanent programs that respond to the needs of the populations served.

As Leo Nuñez says, “Teaching (a FL) in the minoritized Ecuadorian context is an enormous challenge which we must be ready to face in order to help our students in this modern times in which Ecuador is immersed in the process of globalization. I wonder though, if we are even aware of the implications involved in this difficult task?”

What are some of the implications mentioned by Nuñez and his school kids? The following section is devoted to the analysis of the difficulties and controversies surrounding the teaching of foreign languages to minoritized populations, both in regards to infrastructure as well as to ethnic, social and educational issues.

VII. FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR THE MINORITIZED?

With the purpose of contributing to the development of specific educational policies and practices, I now present some general guidelines related to basic educational parameters that would ideally serve as the basis to start a serious program of FL teaching in bilingual intercultural schools²³.

VII.1. Contents

One of the most important challenges in the teaching of a FL is to find ways to teach the foreign culture while reinforcing the students own culture and identity. A way to achieve this might be by including contents which, while presenting the foreign culture, could comparatively lend special importance to the history and culture of minoritized peoples in general. For instance, it will be vital to discuss the multicultural reality of other countries, and to make reference to the countless movements which have occurred in favor of ethnic “minorities”, of the revitalization of the indigenous peoples around the world, and intercultural and diversity affirmation. (Nieto 1991).

For example, several experiences of alternative education among Latinos in the US, have found it very useful to deal with the main subject matter in their language classes; racism in its different types —individual, institutional, cultural—the different facets of discrimination like classism, sexism, and linguicism (‘disdain for a language’), human

rights and strategies for the revitalization of the peoples. One of the main objectives would be to reinforce what is characteristic of the culture and to promote self esteem through the knowledge, discussion, comparison, and comprehension of other people's everyday living. It is well known self esteem is a basic element, not only for school performance in general, but specifically for the development of language and in the learning of foreign languages; because, if the child is not capable of handling his/her own language and culture, he/she will have to face more difficulties in the learning of another²⁴.

Contents to be chosen should be kept within the framework of interculturality and the principles of the BIE and to be gradually presented as part of thematic units. Students' participation in the selection of topics and materials' design, is usually motivating and productive.

VII.2. Methodology

Given the fact that what we want to teach is a foreign language—not about it—teaching methodologies should be focused on the functional aspects of the language, not only towards its structure. Within the context of bilingual intercultural schools, it will be necessary to develop teaching-learning techniques which will be easy to handle and will make the learning process something attractive. As Perugachi²⁵, an English instructor in an Indian rural school, comments:

Even though they (her students) still don't know a lot of English, they have learned it is possible to learn while having fun [...] many of our schools still believe learning must demand blood, sweat, and tears, so I try to make them have fun while learning. I do believe learning a different language should be a practical example of comprehensive learning and interculturality.

The methodology to be used should be of their own; it should be addressed to develop creativity, freedom of expression, group work, and motivation towards discovery. It shall also be necessary to have a constant redefinition and methodology updating as well as educational-pedagogic techniques integrated into the principles of interculturality.

²³ The ideas and suggestions presented in this section were discussed at length with Ileana Soto and several professors, students and indigenous leaders, therefore, I am indebted to them.

²⁴ Borja (1997) analyzed the correspondence between children's self esteem and learning of foreign languages in a private school in Quito. Subsequently, a follow-up was conducted on a portion of a population previously studied, relating their self esteem with the "success" those individuals had achieved as they inserted into society. The author found that in 90% of the cases there was a direct correlation between self esteem, school performance, learning of languages, and insertion of the population included in the sample to society.

²⁵ Elizabeth Perugachi, personal communication 11.19.98.

VII.3. Teachers

Given the fact access to indigenous schools is not always easy, it would be difficult to think that trained teachers will move permanently to their workplace²⁶, and if permanent volunteer cooperation is attained, there could be a risk of having teachers who work out of context, thus it becomes absolutely necessary to have a pool of trained teachers.

Out of the many aspects that should be taken into account in regards to teacher training, I shall refer to two main issues: some linguistic and methodological aspects, and the need to be aware of the main principles on which the BIE is based:

1. If the instructor—be this Indian or Mestizo— is aware of the indigenous reality and has knowledge of the foreign language, but is neither familiar with FL teaching techniques, nor with the principles of the BIE, he/she will need:
 - a. Training both on the theory (linguistics applied to contrastive teaching) as well as on methodology and techniques;
 - b. To become familiarized with the philosophy and principles of interculturality and Bilingual Intercultural Education (BIE).
2. If the instructor is neither conscious of the indigenous reality nor of the BIE, but does know the foreign language, he/she will need:
 - a. To become aware of the ethno-historic reality of the students, their culture, and worldview;
 - b. To be theoretically and methodologically trained.
 - c. To become familiarized with the philosophy and principles of BIE.
3. If the instructor is conscious of the indigenous reality and knows a foreign language and BIE, he/she will still need to be trained on the theory and methodology. In case the instructors do not master the language to be taught, it shall be necessary to design permanent language learning courses, taking into account the objectives of such learning, necessary materials, contents, length of the courses, among others. Agreements with academic institutions or national and international foundations could serve this purpose. Currently, several universities in Ecuador have a series of agreements with foreign institutions, and this would facilitate a first approach with young professionals who have a strong professional training and could be interested in participating in these type of projects.

VII.4. Follow-up versus evaluation

For a long time, evaluation of the teaching-learning processes has been a form of repression for the students. Taking into consideration the objectives of Intercultural Education, it

²² During the survey on attitudes towards the teaching of FL, an interviewee mentioned people who have made an effort to obtain a solid training and formation will be hardly interested in working with the indigenous population. It should be noted that among teachers, being sent to rural areas has been traditionally considered as a sort of painful initiation ritual.

would be advisable that, without lowering learning expectations or altering the pedagogic project, a continuous follow-up be carried out within the framework of mutual respect. That is, to carry out a follow up on the achievements and not an evaluation of the errors made. For this purpose, it would be worthwhile using individual portfolios adapted to each student's situation which should include the participation of the family and the community.

Portfolios are a sort of journals shared by the different actors of the educational process: the student, the teacher, and the family; contents included in these journals will try to emphasize each student's individual progress. Several studies²⁷ show this type of follow-up improves the students' self esteem because it develops a sense of appropriation of their tasks and ideas. This motivates the student and gives the teacher the opportunity to have a closer and relaxed relationship with the class, as he/she stops being an authority and becomes part of a "team", thus allowing each student's individuality to be valued. It is important to mention portfolios are not cumulative folders, but the student and the teacher select the works, based on objectives related to specific areas and to individual projects of the students. Students are motivated to "build" —write, draw, mold—a personal journal, and are responsible for their portfolios. Several experiences of this type, in different cultural contexts, have proven that follow-up, built in this way, eliminates competitiveness and promotes group work and respect towards the other.

VIII. SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

I began this paper asking myself how the teaching-learning of foreign languages would impact on minoritized multilingual contexts. The conflict situation, amid which we try to generate an answer, faces us with a challenge which needs to be faced by both dominant and dominated populations. Additionally, this challenge has multiple dimensions as it encompasses several complementary aspects.

In regards to the society as a whole, what has been analyzed and proposed in this article calls for a restructuring of the powerful society, the educational system and the static ways to conceive the social ordering, otherwise intercultural relations would continue to be a mere ideal.

As for the theoretical and methodological aspects of FL teaching, clear objectives, appropriate methodologies and contents should be determined. These should reinforce both the philosophy of BIE and the worldview of the students.

Concerning the use of languages, it is urgent to define the sociolinguistic purpose of each one of the languages as well as the time and space of their use. Following the BIE philosophy, the teaching of a FL should take into account the implications of including a FL

²⁷ For a detailed description of portfolios, see Batzle 1992, De Fina 1992, Portfolio Evaluation: www.idhsaa.org/regforms/PortfolioDualEnrollment.pdf. (Download date: Jan, 07)

For specific studies regarding the use of portfolios as a means of language acquisition, see, Borja 1977, Nieto 1991, Batzle 1992, European Language Portfolio: www.bris.ac.uk/languagecentre/afl/unit-descriptions/elp.html (Download date: Jan, 07)

in regards to the maintenance of the native language and culture.²⁸ In spite of all that has been said, we are well aware of the fact that a real pedagogic proposal for the teaching-learning of a FL, would only be viable if it is based on an educational-linguistic policy founded on the conviction that education for the minoritized peoples should stop being a sort of a “generous concession” offered by hegemonic groups, to become a right, because learning, and in this case, learning a foreign language, is a right we all have.

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²⁸ There are some cases of use of foreign languages as a way of vindicating indigenous languages in Ecuador. An example of this is a translation into Chinese of Kichwa legends which is being carried out at San Francisco de Quito University (Neubauer 03.2000). Despite the importance these efforts have, the effect they generally produce on the issue of linguistic vindication, is limited to the intellectual and scientific circles; therefore, it is necessary to have a positive impact on the whole of the population, for example by using the mass media. For some detailed suggestions in this sense, see Haboud 2000.

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