

Towards a discourse of heterogeneity in investigating schooling and immigration

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In this paper I review the works by Cathryn Teasley, Mónica Molina & Lluís Maruny and Paul Vedder, respectively, focusing on the research process and, more specifically, on issues derived from the researcher's position in connection with (a) the role of linguistic ideology, (b) the school as a research site, and (c) the notion of multilingual communicative competence. Following the approach of the coordinators of the panel, I believe that each of these issues poses a dilemma whose resolution will necessarily influence not only the methodology adopted and the results obtained but also the interpretation that can be made of the findings.

1. Monolingual vs. multilingual ideologies in language teaching

Following Woolard (1998: 6), I view linguistic ideology as a set of social beliefs about language and socio-communicative practices that are “derived from, rooted in, reflective of, or responsive to the experience or interests of a particular social position”. Social actors produce and reproduce those beliefs in specific social practices in order to sustain or resist particular perceptions of the world, which place them in positions of greater or lesser social power. The classroom, and the school in general, can be seen as a site of different types of socio-communicative practices, whose explanation requires taking into account the linguistic ideology of the social actors involved (teachers, pupils, education authorities, parents). We should not forget, however, that the

research process may also involve socio-communicative practices (interviewing, using questionnaires, participant observation, etc.). Researcher and researched confront these practices with particular linguistic ideologies that need to be considered as well.

Nussbaum (this volume) introduces the concept of *monolingual ideologies* to explain why, to some at least, the presence of immigration may be considered as a disturbing factor in the school, and especially in the teaching of languages. To this concept I would like to add that of *multilingual ideologies* and present them as two opposed directions of an axis along which to locate the ideological positions of the researched actors in connection with language and socio-communicative practices like language teaching and learning.

Once the opposition has been established between monolingual and multilingual discourse, it is necessary to analyse the different socio-communicative practices that take place in the school and look for clues to discover (a) how close to one of the two poles of the axis they are located, (b) because of which actors, and (c) with what means. For example, one socio-communicative practice involves the public communication between the school as an organisation and the individuals participating in it. This communication may take the form of room signals, fliers, class posters, lunch menus, official announcements, etc. In looking for clues to help us locate the different messages along the monolingual-multilingual axis we could focus on the language(s) used, the references to the different origins of students, the topics, etc. Next, we should find out the specific actors that are responsible for each of the messages and inquire about the reasons for both the contents and the form of the message. Finally, we should investigate the means that have been used to produce the message: the material support, the physical location of the message, the channels used to make it reach the addressees, the genre, the mode, etc.

The axis monolingual-multilingual ideologies may be a useful tool to investigate the linguistic aspects of the ideological struggle represented by the opposition, suggested by Martín Rojo (this volume) between a *discourse of homogeneity*, leading to linguistic and cultural assimilation of the immigrants, and a *discourse of heterogeneity*, which favours a respect for diversity. In the educational domain the social tension between these two types of educational discourse is sometimes reflected in the existence of “double discourses” that fluctuate between the discourse of heterogeneity and the discourse of homogeneity.

Teasley (this volume) makes the double discourse treatment the central point of her analysis of the general law of education (*LOGSE*). The goal of her study is to uncover the contradictions it presents between the two discourses. The second document analysed, however, the reforms proposed for the LOCE (*Ley de Calidad*), does not seem to allow the same double discourse analysis. One could attempt to conclude from this fact that certain types of public discourse are not contradictory within themselves. Rather, the discourse of homogeneity is so explicit that it does not allow a double discourse treatment. With this type of discourse the deconstructionist analysis that reveals hidden ideological premises is no longer applicable. Thus, instead of trying to uncover its lack of internal coherence, we need to confront it with other texts and situations in which the discourse of heterogeneity is shown both to make more sense and to be more educationally and socially viable.

Although briefly, Molina & Maruny (this volume) call for a rethinking of the teaching of the second (majority) languages from the point of view of method and technique. They suggest the adoption of communicative approaches as a way of guaranteeing learners' academic survival. This is fairly new for teachers of Catalan and Spanish who are used to teaching these languages as L1. We may have here a first step towards multilingual thinking.

Vedder's study (this volume) can be seen as a way of testing the monolingual and multilingual ideologies of second generation immigrant youngsters as well as those of the society in which they have been brought up. In two of the three groups, L1 proficiency is not associated with ethnic identity (is this a renunciation of the L1?), L1 proficiency correlated negatively with adaptation and, in the case of Antillean youngsters, there is a negative correlation between ethnic identity and adaptation. The results of the study seem to lead towards a support of the assimilation model if our goal is to help individuals to be happier and survive better in the new context. Nevertheless, I could not help having the impression that the respondents to the questionnaire were approaching it with a monolingual ideology which probably coincided with the one they had been imbued with in the course of their education and socialisation.

2. The school as research site

It seems obvious that in a panel of papers with the word "schooling" at the beginning of its title it would be absurd to question the central role of the

school in contributing to social changes. As Nussbaum points out (this volume), in the school we have one of the clearest examples of the mediating function of social institutions between administration/policy makers and citizens. However, Unamuno (this volume) gives us some warning: “La escuela se coloca en el punto de mira, se investiga, se interroga, sin que muchas veces se cuestione, si es la escuela la que tiene que darnos los datos necesarios para entender qué está pasando y qué puede pasar”. In other words, understanding may be increased by going outside the school.

Although it is true, as Miller (2003: 11) says, that “educational systems and schools may celebrate or devalue particular socio-cultural and linguistic forms and practices”, one should not forget Bourdieu’s view (1977) that these forms and practices are created in particular social conditions of language production and reception, which are defined by the society outside the school and the relations of symbolic power among its members. Furthermore, it is dubious whether in the limited context of the classroom and the school immigrant learners can acquire the whole range of competences that are required from them in order to function socially in the new society (Gee, 1996; Lantolf, 2000). For these reasons, I believe that it is important that in researching schooling and immigration we never lose sight of the social context outside the school in which immigrant learners must deploy their communicative skills with much more at stake than in the classroom.

Teasley does go briefly outside the school when she refers to the context of the *Ley de Extranjería* or when she refers to the dominant ethnocentrism and racism in Spanish society. Maybe this points to some pending work there is ahead us: besides showing the contradictions between discourse and practices and within the discourse itself, we could probably devote some of our efforts to show the consistencies between educational discourses and those in other domains of social life as reflection of particular ideologies invading different social domains.

Molina & Maruny seem to have clearly adopted a decision to stay within the walls of the school for their study. They talk about necessary competences to integrate into the educational system and their emphasis is on the improvement of language teaching. They acknowledge that changes in teaching may not guarantee a more efficient process of acquisition and that ultimately a powerful tool is the students’ insertion in the school environment. And this is perhaps the main problem, that our immigrant students are too often inaudible and invisible to the rest of the school. I am not sure whether this can be solved through changes in method or technique.

Vedder's paper is centred on the school to the extent that the participants in the study are either still students or have graduated recently, and also because he explores the relationships among the variables he uses in connection with three educational models: ethnic identity model, language assimilation model, and language integration model. However, of all the variables used only one (socio-cultural adaptation) seems to directly appeal to the school experience of the subjects. The rest of variables (language usage/proficiency, ethnic identity, psychological adaptation) are not necessarily connected to whether the subject is or is not a student. Is this an attempt to go outside the school in order to better understand the reception or the effect of a particular educational policy? We have here an example of educational policy tested through the views of its own beneficiaries. The question now is what educational policy were the subjects exposed to? How representative are their views of a particular dominant ideology?

3. Multilingual communicative competence

Nussbaum claims that one of the main problems in education is that it promotes an idea of communicative competence more typical of monolingual than multilingual situations, with an emphasis on stability, accuracy, the formal aspects of language and with very demanding levels of 'accurate' performance by resorting exclusively to the resources accepted by the dominant society. The idea of bilingual or multilingual competence as the sum of two or more monolingual competencies has been rejected by Grosjean (1992) and Cook (1993), among others, on the grounds that multilingual speakers tend to use different languages for different situations and, therefore, their level of proficiency in each language will differ according to the demands of the situation and purpose for which it has been learnt and it is used. This point of view involves, for Cenoz and Genesse (1998: 27), the following implication for multilingual education and, consequently, for the definition of acceptable levels of communicative competence:

To expect and aim for the same levels and kinds of proficiency as for monolinguals could engender a false feeling of underachievement since, as was pointed out earlier, multilinguals may not need the same levels of proficiency in all of their languages in all of the same discourse domains as monolinguals.

Obviously, in this ‘monolingual’ model of multilingualism it becomes quite easy to point to those with a ‘deficit’ and to adopt a paternalistic approach in our research, as Unamuno points out. What is needed, then, is a redefinition of the parameters through which we evaluate communicative competence. We need to work with multilingual individuals who fare well in our societies from a communicative point of view and who do not necessarily correspond to the model of the Chomskyan ideal speaker of a language that we have been educated into.

Teasley also refers to this problem in her analysis of the contradictions within the *LOGSE*. She says that to talk about tolerance may involve a unilateral (instead of a bi- or multi-lateral) point of view (we tolerate them *vs.* we tolerate one another), those who fit in tolerate those who do not fit in, in the hope that they will soon be able to do so. This idea, when applied to language use, probably involves the need for monolingual speakers to become more multilingual in their social practices.

It is in this sense that Molina & Maruny’s study, realistic as it is, runs the risk of falling into the trap of the ‘deficit approach’. Although, in their defence we could say that they clearly share with Teasley the idea that it is the institution that must adapt to the individual rather than the opposite, we are left with the question of whether all the school needs is to improve its teaching action. In my view, studies like this should be complemented with other studies through which those same subjects are seen exploiting at their best their communicative skills with all the resources they have at hand: their L1, their ‘other’ L2, their physical skills, etc.

Vedder’s work may also be affected by this redefinition of language proficiency and language use. Indeed, the idea of asking a bilingual speaker to discriminate between L1 and L2 usage and proficiency can sometimes be very difficult, as code-switching studies have shown. The distinction seems to be based on the premise that there are well defined contexts of usage for the respondents. This, in my view, does not contribute to a multilingual view of communicative competence.

4. Final remarks

To conclude, my goal in discussing the articles by Teasley, Molina & Maruny and Vedder was to connect them to three of the issues raised by the organisers of the panel and take them as premises to be carefully considered

if research on schooling and immigration is to be committed, protected against manipulation and carried out with an audacious attitude in favour of the underprivileged. In the first place, I have focused upon the relevance of the axis monolingual vs. multilingual linguistic ideology as a tool for analysing the socio-communicative practices that take place in the research site as well as to critically examine the socio-communicative practices involved in the research process. In the second place, I have called the attention upon the importance of researching other social situations, besides the school, in trying to understand what happens inside the school and the real potential for academic and social success of immigrant students. Finally, I have discussed the three papers to the light of the notion of communicative competence, the difference between monolingual and multilingual competence, and the implications this has, again, for both educational and the research processes.

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