

Bilingualism and identity in the post-modern world

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Abstract

Nowadays bilingualism is becoming a positive value to be promoted and defended in our western social and cultural context. Being understood from a wide perspective, bilingualism may be both a way of wielding the power and resisting it. Nevertheless, the most relevant aspect is understanding the sources of value of bilingualism and the nature of valued bilingual practices, because not all of them get the same recognition from the point of view of dominant languages and social groups. It is suggested that according to present dominant linguistic ideologies, the bilingualism that gets value and recognition in postmodernity is the one that is based on certain linguistic behaviours and practices that can only change very slightly monolingual standardizing ideologies which was hegemonic in modernity.

Key words: bilingualism, linguistic minorities, globalization.

Resumo

No clima intelectual, social e cultural actual, ó menos nos contextos occidentais, o bilingüismo tende a constituírse nun valor positivo que se promove e defende. Se interpretamos o bilingüismo desde unha perspectiva ampla, este pode constituír tanto un xeito de exerce-lo poder coma de resistilo. En calquera caso, o que parece máis relevante é entende-las fontes de valor que se lle adxudican ó bilingüismo e a natureza das prácticas bilingües que se valoran, xa que non todas acadan o mesmo recoñecemento desde a perspectiva das linguas e dos grupos sociais dominantes. Suxírese como hipótese que nas ideoloxías lingüísticas actualmente dominantes na posmodernidade o bilingüismo que acada valor e recoñecemento é aquel que está baseado en determinados comportamentos e prácticas lingüísticas que só chegan a alterar moi superficialmente as ideoloxías monolingües e estandarizadoras hexemónicas na modernidade.

Palabras clave: bilingüismo, minorías lingüísticas, mundialización.

1. Bilingualism and post-modernism¹

One of the hallmarks of the idea of post-modernity is hybridity, *métissage*, and other forms of blurred and multiplex identities and practices. While we are only just learning to understand some of our work this way, sociolinguists have of course for a long time been interested in these issues in the form of bi- or multilingual language practices. For many years, we confined ourselves to understanding these phenomena within the framework of the modernist idea of the unilingual nation-state; more recently, notably under the influence of Bakhtin, we have begun to understand that bilingualism is a window onto more complex processes of positioning with respect to dominant and marginalized ideologies regarding the construction of identity and the distribution of power (see Rampton, 1995 and Pujolar, 2000 for examples of such work).

Even so, we tend to examine these issues from the perspective of the marginalized, seeing heteroglossic, multilingual practices as the hallmark of the excluded, voices of resistance to dominant discourses. In this paper, I want to suggest a broader view, one which allows us to examine bilingualism from a number of perspectives, and which allows us to see bilingualism as a site of discursive struggle over social categorization and over power. I will argue here that bilingualism can be a means of wielding power as well as a means of resisting it; what is important is to understand the sources of value of bilingualism and the nature of valued bilingual practices.

In our supposedly pluralistic post-modern world, bilingualism is indeed increasingly valued. However, it seems to me that it is not just any way of being bilingual that is suddenly hip and cool. While the voices of the marginalized are indeed appropriated by the newly powerful, they are incorporated (as “fusion” or “crossover” phenomena) into dominant languages and discourses. True fusion, all the time, is not what is valued; what is valued is the careful separation of linguistic practices, being monolingual several times over (and proving it by making a slip or two every now and then). The voices of the margins are neutralized by being co-opted. This process is underlined by the continued emphasis on the quality of linguistic skills; valued bilingualism includes only the most highly-valued elements of the languages in question. Our traditional ideologies of language, based on standard-building monolingual nation-states, are only being challenged in the most superficial ways by post-modernity. Perhaps, on the contrary, they are even being reinforced by post-modernity’s ability to co-opt heterogeneity, and to turn it into a valuable commodity.

¹ This article is based on a plenary address I gave at the *2nd International Conference on Bilingualism*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, in April 1999. I was able to work on it while acting as Visiting Professor in the Departament de Filologia Catalana, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain), in the spring/summer of 1999. My thanks to Joan Argenter and Joan Pujolar for their comments on a previous version of this text.

2. The new value of bilingualism

Not long ago I was sitting in a kitchen in Berlin, listening to a radio station in Potsdam give us its take on the morning world. I was struck by a song which vaunted (albeit sarcastically) the advantages of being young, free and bilingual in the new Europe. The song turned out to be *Single*, by a British group called The Pet Shop Boys (Cage Music Ltd., 1996).

They call this a community
 I like to think of it as home
 Arriving at the airport I am going it alone
 Ordering a boarding pass
 Travelling in business class
 This is the name of the game
 I'm single bilingual
 Single bilingual
 I come to the community from U.K. p.l.c.
 Arriving at my hotel there are faxes greeting me
 Staying in a junior suite so there's room to meet and greet and after work explain
 how I feel
 "Perdoneme me llamo Neil" (sic)
 I'm single bilingual
 Single bilingual
 In Brussels Bonn or Barcelona I'm in demand and quite at home there
 "Adelante!" Through the door
 "Un momento por favor"
 This is what I get paid for
 "Muchas gracias señor"
 I'm a player in the continental game with unlimited expenses to reclaim
 Information's easy
 Tapping at my PC
 That is the frame of the game
 I'm single bilingual
 Single bilingual
 I'm single bilingual
 Single bilingual
 "Hay una discoteca por aqui?" (sic)

The message of this song seems clearly to be that the new elite is made up of unattached young people who make a living flying all over Europe, attending meetings one day in Barcelona and the next in Brussels. Their position is related in no small measure to their mastery of more than one language. The Pet Shop Boys may be partly mocking this new group, but that in no way calls its perceived existence into question. (They may also be linking the boundary-blurring of bilingualism to the boundary-blurring of bisexuality, but that simply reinforces the interest: the more different kinds of practices you can engage in, the more power you have, and the hipper you are; my thanks to Adrian Blackledge for pointing out the link).

This song struck me for two reasons. First, it is the first time in my

experience of listening to morning radio that I can remember a popular song focussed explicitly on multilingual repertoires; certainly multilingualism has made its way into popular culture before (notably in the new varieties of world music), but mainly in the form of multilingual practices produced by marginalized groups aiming at fragmenting the unity of the dominant group. Recently, “fusion” and “crossover” music are becoming more and more popular in the mainstream, as witnessed for example by the upsurge in U.S. interest in Latino musical influences (with songs sung only very partially in Spanish). But it was less clear to me before I heard this song that popular culture might also include the (ironized) voice of elite multilinguals, who, by their ironization, also invoke the voice of monolinguals who feel marginalized by elite multilingualism. The new economic order places some form of multilingualism at the centre of power and status, coexisting with a multilingualism that is a strategy of resistance on the part of marginalized groups. Second, the message of the song touched something that I was beginning to understand about the changes I have been seeing around me in Canada for the last few years: language is becoming a commodity.

I’d like to explore here some ways in which the new world order is influencing who gets to be bilingual and what it means to be bilingual, both in the sense of who accords what value to bilingualism, and in the sense of what kinds of bilingual practices are valued. I do this for two reasons: 1) in order to begin to get a handle on bilingualism in the world around us; and 2) to develop a perspective on bilingualism which links individual language practices to the social distribution of symbolic and material resources.

The dimensions of contemporary social and economic processes that I want to attend to in particular are globalization and the new economy. We find ourselves at a turning point, in which, at least in Europe and North America, there is a tension between understanding language as primarily linked to the construction and operation of nation-States and understanding language as primarily linked to the control over and access to the production and distribution of economic resources. The “economic turn” comprises struggles over who gets to exercise such control and how.

One arena of struggle concerns multilingualism versus monolingualism as mode of control and resistance. Opposing monolingualisms is a form of struggle we are used to. Today, one also sees, for example, in opposing tendencies towards the fashionable multilingualism of the Pet Shop Boys’ song, on the one hand, and, on the other, towards the McDonaldization of linguistic practice in the form of the colonization of the world’s linguistic economy by English. Where multilingualism is tied to economic advantage, the marginalized may resist learning more than one language (in Catalunya, for example, some working-class Castilian-speakers seem to resist learning Catalan); while multilingualism may be the mode of resistance to monolingual modes of exercising power (as is sometimes the case in French Canada, where immigrant groups and anglophones may flaunt their multilingualism as a way of undermining francophone control).

Another parameter of struggle concerns the relationship between local and global sites of control and selection. Will decisions be taken centrally for large numbers of sites and people? Or will smaller groups have a measure of control over local decisions which then must be intertwined with those taken elsewhere, in multiple relations of interdependence? Will Paris decide what counts as French, or will Paris have to live with what is being developed in Dakar, Port-au-Prince and Montreal?

A final arena of struggle is local, and concerns who gets to define what counts as criteria of selection. Here one sees such struggles manifested in debates over linguistic standards or norms, and over access to bilingualism through education. In the first area, I can cite a recent spate of publications in Quebec on what should count as good French in Quebec (see discussion in Laforest, 1999), which focus, among other things, on the necessity of a local versus an international norm, on the acceptability of variation and on the place of the vernacular. Similar debates can be identified in Wales, Catalonia, Corsica and Brittany, to name just a few. These debates are largely about ideologies of identity, and who gets to define them. The second area is about the regulation of access to linguistic resources. As examples, let me point to discussions in Quebec over who gets access to English-language education or over what school level is most appropriate for introducing English classes into French-language schools, or to those in Catalunya over whether or not Catalan should be obligatory as language of instruction. These are debates about the distribution of multilingualism, about the relative value of monolingual and multilingual repertoires, and about the relative value of linguistic varieties in circulation, and for whom.

These developments are heightened by another salient dimension of the new world order, the fact that the globalizing economy is increasingly based on services and information. Tourism is increasingly important in economically marginalized areas as a source of employment, and culture and communication are increasingly the basis of economic activity elsewhere (as in the computer and telecommunications industries). In those sectors, of course, language is central: services and information *are* language. Language practices of all kinds are thus at the heart of the new economy, and as a result they become part of its system of exchange. They are, in that sense, commodified.

The Pet Shop Boys' song raises a large number of questions. Some of these questions are about the value to accord to multilingualism, some are about the nature of the multilingualism to value, and some are about the value to accord to the linguistic varieties which are the constituent elements of multilingual repertoires. These questions are relevant to the daily lives of increasing numbers of people. In order to address them, though, we have to grasp how the political and the economic are tied to the social and cultural, and how the local is tied to the global.

I would like to illustrate this interrelatedness of local and global, political and economic dimensions of bilingualism through some excerpts from a recent article in Toronto's *Globe and Mail* newspaper (my thanks to Maia Yarymowich for

bringing this article to my attention). The article (published 19 March 1999) concerns “Crazy English”, a home-study method for learning English developed in China, for Chinese, by one Li Yang. The details of the method are perhaps not of central concern here, but it is interesting to note that it essentially involves yelling English phrases at the top of your voice. Why do this? This is how the *Globe* quotes Mr. Li’s account: “English is chosen by God to be the language that rules the world. China has 5000 years of history. But today it is a backward nation. We must learn English to compete... We need foreigners to be servants of China. The best way to defeat the United States is to learn good English.” Thus for Mr. Li, in this account, it is necessary for China to protect its national economic interests against the global expansion of U.S.-based capitalism, not by rejecting either its capitalism or its language, but rather by learning American tools of power and using them for the advancement of Chinese interests in the global marketplace. The *Globe* says : “Mr. Li said ... (h)e is simply trying to give the Chinese a version of the American dream: to move from rags to riches by learning English and outwitting foreigners in the global marketplace.” Indeed, Mr. Li is commodifying his version of English and English-language learning by attempting to build a pyramid-type licensing scheme which would sell not just the right to teach the method but also products with the “Crazy English” name.

In addition, Mr. Li has a very specific idea of what it means to learn English. First, he is clear that this English learning is not in any way about abandoning Chinese, but rather about adding English to one’s repertoire. Second, he is clear that this repertoire should keep the two varieties distinctly separate. The *Globe* says: “As for the 50 million Chinese who live outside China, Mr. Li attacks them for daring to mix Chinese and English when speaking to each other. ‘These overseas Chinese are arrogant. They are bats, neither animal nor bird. They are homeless. How can we tolerate the Chinese language, with 5000 years of history, being polluted by English?’” This is an ideology which constructs bilingualism as two separate monolingualisms stuck together. Third, Mr. Li is concerned with learning “good” English. He is quoted as saying, “What we should learn is educated and standard English”. Finally, and this is perhaps a sobering thought for those of us who have been focussing on text as the key to the new economy, Mr. Li focusses on spoken language, and in particular on sounding native-like. (His preferred accent is characterized by the *Globe* as “Midwest”.)

So are the Pet Shop Boys’ Neil and Mr. Li the face of the new ideology and practice of bilingualism? This is a bilingualism of the economic elite, a bilingualism in which what counts is the economic exchange value of linguistic practices and the ability to use bilingualism as a way of advancing local interests in the global marketplace (presumably the Pet Shop Boys’ Neil would rather have himself fly business class than some Dieter or Juan). It may well be a highly gendered bilingualism (notice no one is talking about Maureen flying business class, never mind Petra or Dolores). It is a bilingualism which eschews bilingual practices, and which values standard, that is to say, prestige, varieties. It is a bilingualism which

encounters, and struggles with, other discourses and practices, ones which really do blur boundaries, and which contain still-stigmatized forms.

3. The commodification of bilingualism in French Canada

Some of my recent research as focussed on some similar processes in Canada. Things first dawned on me during an ethnographic study I conducted in a French-language minority high school in the Toronto area in the early 1990s (Heller, 1999). This is a school which exemplifies linguistic minority struggles of the past thirty years, across Europe and North America, as well as elsewhere (see for example Martin-Jones & Heller, 2001; Blommaert, 1999; Jaffe, 1999; McDonald, 1990). In the wake of Québécois nationalism, francophones across Canada have adopted an ideology of linguistic nationalism. In the case of Quebec (as in Catalunya, Corsica, Wales, Brittany, and other places) this nationalism has taken the form of territorial, State, ethnic nationalism; elsewhere in Canada (and in the world), geographical territories and States are not possible, and so the fight has been to establish institutional territories. That is, just as Quebec (and other places) fight for a State along the lines of the monolingual nation-state model of Europe, in Ontario (and other places) the fight is for monolingual and autonomous institutional spaces. The school in which I worked (and which I have called Champlain, which is of course not its real name) is an example of such an institution: born out of the struggle for Franco-Ontarian rights, it is meant as a monolingual French space in which minority francophones can safely develop the skills and resources which will allow them full participation in the modern world.

In this respect, Champlain represents an essentialist concept of the authentic nation. The logic of political mobilization has required such essentializing, as a basis not only of solidarity, but of legitimacy in a world in which the dominant groups still find convincing the argument that a people and a State should go together (if you have a people without a State, they should get a State; if you have a State without a people, you should make a people). The result is an ideology of language and nation in which both are seen as wholes which must be kept intact. If you absolutely have to be bilingual (and in Canada, just as in China, English *is* understood as a necessity, although possibly an unfortunate one), then you should be monolingual twice over. And in one's practices, languages should be kept strictly separate. In Ontario, one finds this ideology widely reiterated in the form of an oft-repeated saying: *L'anglais, ça s'attrape*. That is, you can catch English the way you catch a cold; and indeed, many people go on and complete the expression by explicitly linking English to viruses (interestingly, never to bacteria). Thus, such linguistic nationalism is necessarily linked to purism, both as it is manifested in discursive space and in linguistic structure. In order to ward off the virus, which contaminates, it is necessary to create safe, quarantined zones.

In schools like Champlain, much effort goes into creating such zones. The linguistic production of all school participants is monitored and self-monitored in

order to produce a monolingual public face. Participants with an interest in reproducing the school's dominant ideology discursively and physically construct Goffmanian front-stage and back-stage zones (Goffman, 1971) in order to cope with the incursion of English into school life. Sometimes the strategy is institutional: schools make an effort to separate students by some measure of linguistic competence in French, the results of which are used to stream students into different programmes. Sometimes people use interactional strategies which mark off English as offstage or backstage, even within a conversation. These strategies can be paralinguistic (loudness, pitch, eye gaze, body orientation) and/or discursive (code-switching and code choice as related to the social or content organization of monologue or conversation, such as turn-taking, topicalization, and so on). Students may also collaborate by keeping their use of English to backstage zones such as corridors and cafeterias. Of course, those who want to resist need only violate those conventions, by engaging in bilingual practices which mix languages in public.

But Champlain runs into exactly the problems that every such linguistic minority movement or institution is running into these days. The purpose of the school is to prepare students for entry into the modern world, on the basis of an ideology of democracy and meritocracy. The reason for having those zones is in order to acquire forms of linguistic capital which are understood as having value *not* primarily within the confines of the minority market, but rather on the broad, global market. The idea is that being bilingual in French and English is likely to facilitate access to good jobs, because both are languages with international exchange value. In order to profit from a bilingualism which was once a stigma, francophones in Canada are trying to build on the old solidarity which helped people to cope with oppression and marginalization; and on institutions which are meant to reproduce the authentic French and authentic *francitude* which will preserve French-English bilingualism as privileged territory, as rightfully theirs (as opposed to being the property of the anglophones who are trying to get in on the same act through immersion education). A diploma from a "real" French-language school potentially carries more weight than one from an immersion school, if you are trying to convince an employer that you are "really" bilingual (nobody will worry about the quality of your English, since everyone knows that *l'anglais, ça s'attrape*).

The problems this raises are as follows: first, the legitimizing value of authenticity is carried by polynomic, bilingual contact-type variety, stigmatized forms and practices (re the concept of polynomia, see Marcellesi & Gardin, 1974; see also Jaffe, 1999). These are not the pure, uniformized forms and practices which are understood to be the ones which are valued on the global market (at Champlain this linguistic variety, or rather, this concept of a linguistic variety, was often called *le français international*). So Champlain has to somehow work out the contradiction between its legitimizing image and its goals. Second, the logic of mobilization in this context necessitates practices of inclusion and exclusion which run directly counter to the principles of democracy and meritocracy which are also part of Champlain's legitimizing ideology.

This means that it is necessary to work on deciding who gets access to schools like Champlain, and therefore who gets access to the linguistic capital and bilingualism-related credentials distributed there, without seeming undemocratic. It means evaluating linguistic performances in ways that seem meritocratic rather than discriminatory. And Champlain has found ways to do this. On the institutional level, Champlain is merely one element in a larger set of institutions which are subject to legal regulation, and indeed community representatives frequently seek to have difficult things like control and access settled through the courts. With respect to language, Champlain has found solutions such as constructing an ideology of French which, in an interestingly Chomsky-like way, separates the core of the language, which all French-speakers share (a kind of *français zéro*, to borrow Chaudenson's term; cf. Chaudenson, 1993), from the variations in how that competence is actually realized; and then working on the realizations so that they conform to the *français international* which will permit a Canadian to do business with a Senegalese without having trouble communicating. Champlain has also bought into reproducing the dominant discourses of language and nation, so that bilingual practices which are too mixed are placed off-limits, either institutionally or discursively (and in ways which may not be specific to schools). For example, mixed utterances offered by students in class may be explicitly or implicitly reformulated as monolingual utterances; students who insist on using English where they are expected to use French may find themselves subject to disciplinary measures; and so on.

So what does Champlain teach us about bilingualism and globalization? It is going through precisely the shift I referred to earlier. Born out of a political struggle for rights, for access to political power and to the economic resources controlled by the anglophone majority, the school must come to terms with the contradictions between that movement's legitimizing discourse and the movement's goals: to profit from privileged access to specific forms of bilingualism as they are understood to have value on the global marketplace. The school is becoming less and less a safe haven for a marginalized minority (although it is that, too), and more and more a site of struggle over a commodified bilingualism. And that bilingualism takes a very specific form: first, it is a bilingualism in which the language varieties involved are meant to be as socially, regionally, and geographically neutral as possible. Second, it is a bilingualism which is two monolingualisms stuck together, in which each language is kept "whole", "intact", each one separate from the other. It is therefore a bilingualism in which traces of contact in language practices are potentially dangerous, and which are certainly institutionally negatively sanctioned.

In January 1999, Shana Poplack, professor of linguistics at the University of Ottawa, gave a talk at a research centre at her university on code-switching in the Ottawa region (Poplack, 1999). She argued that English-French code-switching does indeed exist there, but that this is not necessarily a sign of assimilation. Apparently, this talk caused something of an uproar among the audience, who mainly argued back that this was not at all their own experience of language contact. For them, as French-speakers in the Ottawa region, not keeping the two languages separate necessarily

meant that English was encroaching on French. And if people speak French with traces of contact with English, then that means that French is losing ground (CRCCF, 1999).

Now, we see this ideology at work in the education system at the primary and secondary levels, and apparently, if the University of Ottawa is a good example, at the post-secondary level as well (and I have good reason to think that the University of Ottawa is far from being an isolated example, given my involvement in such issues in other francophone or bilingual Canadian universities). And education has become a key site of distribution of commodified linguistic capital, as former sites of production and reproduction of linguistic capital disappear or are transformed (for example, the family and the Church no longer play the social role they used to play in French Canada, and the government is withdrawing from civil society as part of a general neo-liberal movement in Europe and North America; the reasons for this are intimately tied to the processes of globalization which are at issue here, but they are beyond the scope of this paper.) At the same time, this linguistic capital is the object of national or ethnic struggles over privileged control over and access to it.

It is less clear to me how these processes play themselves out in other arenas, and so that is the question I and some colleagues of mine have been asking over the past few years². In what follows, I will take a look at a few of the sites we have been examining to see in what ways my claims about globalization, nationalism and bilingualism are supported there.

The first site I would like to mention here is a small town in southern Ontario. It developed mainly as an industrial town, focussed on heavy industry: wood, steel, textiles. Its francophone population came in two main waves, the 1920s and the 1940s, mainly from Quebec (where entire extended families were recruited to work in the textile mills) but also from northern Ontario. They joined other “immigrants”, almost all from Europe (Italy, Hungary, Poland, Croatia and so on). For many decades this town functioned in a way which was fairly typical for North America: the workers lived in solidary, self-helping working-class, ethnically relatively homogeneous neighbourhoods. The French were particularly successful in maintaining their language and identity in what came to be called “French Town”, possibly because of a long tradition of resistance to assimilation, because Quebec and northern Ontario were still close enough that family and parish ties could be maintained, francophone priests could provide parish leadership, and in-migration could continue. Nonetheless, the community leaders were all for peaceful co-habitation with the English-speakers who owned the town’s factories and dominated

² “Prise de parole: la construction de l’espace discursif en milieu minoritaire francophone au Canada” (principal investigators: Jürgen Erfurt, Monica Heller and Normand Labrie). The research has been funded over the period 1996-2000 by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the German-American Academic Council Foundation and AUPELF-UREF. Research at Champlain (1991-1995) was also supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and by the Ontario Ministry of Education Transfer Grant to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

its political life, and it was quite clear that social, economic and political mobility required learning English. Antoine Guérin, now well into his sixties, describes how he positioned himself with regard to this situation when he finished school almost fifty years ago: “*ma apprendre l’anglais, mais je perdrai pas mon français*” (I’ll learn English, but I won’t lose my French).

In the 1980s, the town’s industrial base began to collapse. Factories closed or down-sized drastically. The town became known for its high rate of unemployment. However, in the past five years or so, the dust has begun to settle, and some interesting things are emerging. First, in the remaining factory jobs, technology is changing what it means to work in a factory. Notably, working in such a place requires language skills in ways that just didn’t exist before. Inside the workplace, such skills would seem to be mainly in English (the language of technology). However, those same factories now find themselves part of international networks of factories owned by the same company, and placed in relations of interdependence which require international communication.

Second, the town has looked around to see what might be possible sources of economic development and has settled on two: tourism and call centres. Both these sectors have for the moment a mainly national clientele, requiring French-English bilingual skills, especially oral skills. These sectors are aiming at an international clientele, which will only increase the interest in multilingualism. But most importantly, for my purposes, French is shifting from being the language of working-class solidarity and community, to being a commodity with obvious exchange value on the job market. Here is just one angle on this, from an interview with a young woman I will call Amélie Gagnon. Amélie was born and raised in this town, and now works as a hotel manager for a U.S. based chain. Her hotel frequently hosts tour groups from Quebec. Amélie talks first about what it was like growing up in this town in the 1970s:

alors euh je trouve quand j’étais même quand j’étais au secondaire c’était comme j’avais honte de parler mais la ma langue française (...) Pis je pensais “ah jeez” you know “she’s speaking French” ah no you know like I felt I was an outcast. So c’est pour ça je pratiquais pas mon français. P(u)is même à (l)a maison ahm, mes parents nous parlaient en français p(u)is on a commencé à répondre en anglais p(u)is ça éventuellement p(u)is j’ai trouvé que ça a juste devenu même à (l)a maison euh l’environnement anglais

(so uh I think when I was even when I was in high school it was like I was ashamed to speak my French language (...). And I thought “ah jeez” you know “she’s speaking French” ah no you know like I felt I was an outcast. So it was because of that that I didn’t speak French. And even at home, ahm, my parents spoke to us in French and we started answering in English and that eventually and I found that it just became even at home an English environment)

And then later she talks about how she sees things now:

On voulait rester dans le en l’environnement français parce qu’on avait plusieurs

employés comme je dis et aussi parce qu'on fait des forfaits à Québec ahm on voulait garder les francophones ahm la clientèle francophone ici dans la région (...) (il) y a une partie là qu'i(ls) veulent développer pour euh les call centres alors j'espère que ça va continuer encore on a plusieurs t'sais tous les francophones à [l'école secondaire] ça va leur donner une opportunité pour euhm un emploi bilingue (...) je trouve que i(ls) devraient faire plus de publicité à les jeunes pour leur dire comment important que ça l'est pour garder leur langue bilingue parce que (il) y a beaucoup de chances pour eux-autres pour l'avenir

(We wanted to stay in the in the French environment because we had many employees as I say and also because we do package tours in Quebec ahm we wanted to keep the francophones ahm the francophone clientèle here in the region (...) there is a part there they want to develop for uh the call centres so I hope that will continue we have many you know all the francophones at the (high school) that will give them an opportunity for uhm a bilingual job (...) I find that they should do more publicity with the young people to tell them how important it is their bilingual language because there are a lot of possibilities for them for the future)

Now, even if Amélie might have been somewhat overstating the case for our benefit, it nonetheless remains that she represents whatever value French may have for her and others like her as coming from the new service and information sectors which depend for their success on national and international markets. Life can no longer be lived in French Town alone.

It remains to be seen how these changes are actually lived. One member of our research team, Sylvie Roy, has recently completed (1998-1999) an ethnographic study of the largest call center in that region, and the results of her work will certainly help illuminate some issues. Right now it appears that while being bilingual in French and English certainly helps people get a foot in the door (no small thing of course in a town with a high unemployment rate), it becomes less and less important the higher up you go. That is, bilingualism is important for the lowest-paid front-line workers, the ones on the phones. Here is a description of this situation from an interview Sylvie conducted with a bilingual manager (note that the manager chose to do the interview in English):

Manager: (...) it's interesting, in my position today it's [bilingualism is] an asset, it's not necessarily a requirement because all of our day-to-day dealings are very much in English. When I speak with my staff hm

Sylvie: even the bilingual one(s)

Manager: yeah so very much the day-to-day business is English hm the only time French really kicks in is when we speak with the customer itself, so I guess if you look the manager position (xx) it's not a requirement to be bilingual, however it is certainly an asset the asset comes in when the clients ask or choose to speak with the manager

Sylvie: yeah

Manager: and I can easily have that conversation (xx) unilingual manager will not be able to have to refer that call to a supervisor someone else in the department (...)

There is also some talk about conventions; for both French and English, for example, the company places a major emphasis on business-like language and language practices, although it is not yet clear exactly what that means. It is also not clear what kinds of French and English are valued; on the one hand, it is necessary to make contact with all kinds of people, so a wide range of linguistic varieties might be an asset. On the other hand, there is a concern about “the quality” of French, and some notion that perhaps the local population does not speak French the way the company would like its employees to. These tensions are manifested in the following interview with a manager in charge of training:

Manager: (...) and that is probably one of the biggest issues for French as we're moving to we're not doing full French language yet BUT quite often French is? a lot of slang French will choose to (xx) and if the customer is choosing that language sometimes you know le tower [in “proper” English: the tow-truck; in “proper” French: le camion-remorque] or something?

Sylvie: yeah un towing

Manager: you know?

Sylvie: mhm

Manager: instead of the proper language the customer might not understand if you use the proper terminology because they (have) also grown up with half-English half-French and they certain words don't translate well? and so they just use like tower instead of whatever it is

Sylvie: yeah

Manager: I'm not French so? so sometimes you have to make those concessions but

Sylvie: make concessions you mean? (xx)

Manager: well we have to get in tune with what the customer is?

Sylvie: okay

Manager: without using too much slang? but not being (3 second pause)

Sylvie: too much to understand

Manager: yeah too hard on the customer that they won't understand what you're talking about

Sylvie: okay

Manager: so there's a fine line and there's always a gray area whether (it) be English or French

How these tensions play themselves out is a research question that remains to be answered, although there seems to be a tendency toward the kinds of linguistic separation and normativity that we saw earlier. Certainly, the technology points in that direction; anyone familiar with automatic telephone systems in Canada will have frequently been given the following choice by some mechanical voice: “For service in English, press 1; *pour le service en français, appuyer sur le 2*”. Too bad for those of us who might want service in both.

In some of the other sites we have been working in, a somewhat different dynamic has been taking place, although the contours are similar. In other parts of Ontario, as well as in the Maritimes, traditional economic bases for linguistic and

cultural reproduction are also breaking down: agriculture, mining, fishing and the lumber industry no longer provide the material conditions for language maintenance that they once did, and in any case the community wants to at least have access to other sectors for those who want to pursue other lines of work. In many of these areas, the local population has found that it has something to offer for which there is a market: local, authentic, cultural products. We are seeing the development of reconstructed “pioneer” villages, in which tourists are invited to see the origins of Acadia, or French Ontario, as it was back then (“back then” generally being the eighteenth century *before* the British Conquest), or else to discover the heretofore hidden contributions of francophone inhabitants of English-dominated areas (such as Ottawa). We are also seeing the development and marketing of various kinds of artistic products (paintings, sculptures, literature, theatre, music) which embed local tradition in a modern frame. Particularly popular apparently (especially in Europe) is traditional fiddle music to a modern rock or country beat, with lyrics in local French, especially when played and sung by people with an identifiable link to an identifiable marginal minority place. And in their places of origin, there is pride, and happiness: those young people are from here, they learned to play the violin from their grandparents, and they come back every year to play at our festival. And what we possess in the way of cultural capital now has value beyond our doors.

This move is not without its debates (see, for example, IFO, in press). There are artists who accuse the producers of such products of folklorizing their people (and profiting from it). There are artists who say they want to produce universal art, just from where they are, without having to move to Montreal, Paris or New York. Nonetheless, there is clearly a market for the other kind of “authentic” product, which may get stronger and stronger the harder it is to find something other than a hamburger to eat or someplace other than the Gap to buy clothes.

Cajun music was probably the precursor of what has become a much wider, and more lucrative, movement for francophone North American products on the world market. The movement does still retain its local attachments, and has in many ways allowed for the building of new solidarities. Zachary Richard, one of the better-known Cajun musicians of the new generation, has been largely responsible for raising francophone North American consciousness and solidarity with Louisiana, and is solidly behind French “immersion” programs in his native state which are designed to prevent the disappearance of French there. Of course, this necessitates decisions about what French is to be taught in those schools (Cajun French, Creole French, “international” French?), and who is to be considered a legitimate client of such a school (given, for example, that many people who might be considered Cajuns do not speak any form of French, and that some people who do speak some form of French do not necessarily consider themselves Cajun). That is, whose French is legitimate, and who has legitimate access to it? Such decisions, which have crucial consequences for the distribution and valuing of linguistic capital, are of course also tied to the current distribution of linguistic resources (for example, it is difficult to find French-speaking holders of teaching credentials in Louisiana and so most

teachers have to be imported, mainly from Quebec, Belgium, France and New Brunswick) and to the distribution of interest in acquiring the linguistic resources the school distributes.

In these ways, probably among others, francophone North America participates in the exploitation of authenticity in order to gain privileged access to commodified linguistic resources of value in the new globalized economy. Schools become sites for struggle over access to those resources, and workplaces become sites for their display and investment, as well as becoming sites for struggle among possessors of that capital for economic advancement. Possessors of different sets of linguistic resources also struggle to create or exploit newly possible economic niches (such as popular culture and tourism, in which both authenticity and hybridity are valued).

4. Conclusion

The ways in which globalization influences the value of bilingualism and the ideologies of its practices and its forms will of course vary from place to place. A specificity of Canada is that the locally dominant language, English, is also the major language of globalization and international influence and power. It is that much harder to resist its domination. In other countries, such as Switzerland, English can on the contrary be a kind of safety valve; since both French-speakers and German-speakers in Switzerland speak English, they can use that language as a kind of neutral lingua franca in their own inter-community exchanges, thereby avoiding the difficulties of negotiating language choice between French, Swiss German and standard German. At the same time, in Canada, the two languages in question are both international languages; in Wales, or Brittany, or Catalonia, the minority language is not a world language, and so its value is differently located, and locatable, in the context of world and regional markets.

What I have tried to do here is to raise some questions about the ways in which economic processes are closely tied to ideologies and practices of bilingualism. What I think I see happening is that globalization, and the expansion of corporate capitalism, is placing an exchange value on bilingualism, that is to say, commodifying it. But it is also influencing what kinds of bilingualism are valued, and here I see an emphasis on bilingualism as two monolingualisms stuck together, a reproduction of the old nation-state emphasis on “whole” languages, but with a new twist. The celebration of “fusion” and “hybridity” may simply be a way of legitimating what are actually multiple monolingualisms, and the privileged position of those with the right kind of multilingual repertoires. It may also signal a struggle between two elites, one with an investment in monolingualism, the other with an investment in multilingualism. Then again, the second elite may well actually depend for its privileges on the existence of the first.

I also see an emphasis on new justifications for old tendencies towards standardization, ones which emphasize international communicability rather than

national unity. But I also see struggles over privileged access to the newly economically valuable resources, and these struggles use authenticity to justify claims. This will lead us to contradictions between democracy and meritocracy, on the one hand, and exclusion on the other, which somehow we will have to deal with.

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