

The Sociolinguistic Environment of a Bilingual School: A Case Study Introduction

Kathy Escamilla
University of Colorado, Denver

Abstract

Currently, much of the literature on school reform and renewal cites the need to look at reform from the level of the school as unit. Therefore, it is necessary to study programs such as bilingual programs in the context of the larger school environment in which they exist. The larger school context can greatly impact what goes on in bilingual classrooms within the school. This study reports the results of a case study of a school that labels itself as a "bilingual school". The study examines and describes language use in bilingual classrooms in the school and language use in the larger school environment outside of the classroom. The study asserts that if bilingual programs are to be places where children truly become bilingual and biliterate, then the environment outside of the classroom must encourage and support the use of two languages with the same enthusiasm as the environment inside bilingual classrooms. Further, each language must have the same status outside the classroom in a bilingual school. Results of the study conclude that, while two languages are used both inside and outside bilingual classes at this school, they each serve different functions. Further, while both languages are used, they do not share equal status. Evidence for these results is provided in the study.

Introduction

Bilingual education programs began to be widely implemented in the United States in the 1970s, 80s and 90s as a result of the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title VII Bilingual Education Act of 1968. This act gave the federal government a large role in the development and implementation of bilingual programs across the United States. Federal direction for bilingual education has been the pervasive influence in the field and state and local policy with regard to bilingual education has mirrored and echoed federal policy in the years since 1968.

Over the years, no field of education has been quite as controversial or widely debated as the field of bilingual education (Baker 1990; Baker & de Kanter, 1981, 1983; Cummins, 1981, 86, 89; Imhoff, 1990a, b; Porter, 1990; Rossell, 1990; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981, 1988). Further, the term Bilingual Education,

despite a central federal focus, has had numerous definitions, and programs of bilingual education are as diverse as they are numerous (Crawford, 1989, IDRA, 1985).

There are, however, some commonalities that all bilingual programs have. These commonalities have resulted from the similarity of state and federal requirements for bilingual programs and they are as follows: (a) bilingual programs must use a child's native language as a medium of instruction, (b) bilingual programs must include the teaching of literacy in a child's native language, and (c) bilingual programs must teach English as a second language and eventually transfer students from native language reading to reading in English (Title VII- ESEA, 1974, 1978, 1984, 1988).

The commonalities discussed above are largely related to instructional issues. Therefore, bilingual education programs have come to be seen as programs that exist as "add-ons" to the "regular school program". As "add-ons", these programs have rarely been studied at a school-wide level. In fact, much of the research in the field has consisted of effectiveness studies conducted to evaluate overall program effectiveness or the effectiveness of one type of program model compared to another (Baker & de Kanter, 1981; Crespo, 1986; Cziko, 1992; Danoff, Coles, McLaughlin & Reynolds, 1978, Hakuta & Gould, 1987; Krashen, 1987; Ramírez, Yuen, Ramey & Pasta, 1991; Troike, 1978; U.S. General Accounting Office, 1987; Willig, 1985; Zappert & Cruz, 1977). Added to the body of effectiveness research, is an additional body of research which focus on the bilingual classroom and instructional practices within the classroom (Cazden, 1984; Escamilla, 1992; García 1988, 1992; Ramírez, Yuen, Ramey & Pasta, 1991; Tikunoff, 1985).

Both types of research, have added to the knowledge base about effective programs and effective instructional practices. However, such research has concentrated on changing and improving classrooms and programs, without looking at the concomitant need to change schools. Recent efforts at school reform have asserted that the reason many school improvement programs have been seemingly unsuccessful is that the changes have been directed at only a part of the school (e.g., the classroom), and not at the total school environment (Coiner, 1980; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991; Goodlad, 1984; Qakes, 1986; Sarason, 1990). Other writers have asserted that instructional innovations of any type cannot be successful unless the innovation considers and is compatible with

the larger context of the school culture outside of the classroom (Coiner, 1980; Goldenberg, 1990; McCaslin & Good, 1992; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

With regard to the implementation of bilingual education programs, it may be that limiting these programs to “classroom level programs’ has had a negative impact on the ability of the programs to meet their stated goals. That is, even for schools with well established bilingual programs, the larger school environment remains an English-speaking institution. In this context, the linguistic, academic and social goals of bilingual education are thought to be achievable in the bilingual classroom, without the need for additional support from the larger school environment. This assumption contradicts much of what is known about how two languages are learned, acquired, given status and maintained. Among the factors which encourage childhood acquisition of two languages are: (a) that the languages involved have equal status in a community, (b) that both languages are spoken by individuals who are important to the child, (c) that the larger environment demands the use of two languages, and (d) that there are ample opportunities to speak and use the language in many social contexts (Cohen, 1975; Collier, 1992; Cooper, 1989; Hakuta, 1986; Pease-Alvarez & Hakuta, 1992; Snow, 1992).

Research in the area of sociolinguistics would assert that it is naive to set up classrooms that purport to give equal value and status to two languages without considering whether the larger school environment and community also give equal status to the two languages. Phillipson (1992) argues that wherever more than one language or language variety exist together, their status in relationship to one another is rarely equal, rather it is asymmetric. One language will be perceived as superior, desirable and necessary, while the other will be seen as inferior, undesirable and extraneous.

The case of Spanish and English in the United States is a good example of an asymmetric relationship with regard to language status. English is clearly the dominant and desired language, while Spanish is seen as inferior and unnecessary. Eriksen (1992) argues that Spanish speakers in the United States are confronted with a hostile linguistic environment where there are no incentives to become bilingual. Rather, the incentives are strong toward linguistic assimilation of English and shedding Spanish.

So strong is the pressure from the larger society toward linguistic assimilation by Spanish speakers, that it is unlikely that

monolingual Spanish-speaking children entering U.S. schools in the 1990s will leave school being bilingual. They will enter school being primarily Spanish-speaking and leave school being primarily English speaking (Hernández-Chávez, 1994; Wong-Fillmore, 1991).

It will be argued in this paper that bilingual education programs which are narrowly focused on classroom level efforts at equalizing the status of Spanish and English will do little to decrease this rapid language shift unless the larger school environment becomes aggressively involved in overt efforts to create a more equal relationship between the two languages.

In his studies on schools and society, Giroux (1991) concluded that the role of schools in the U.S., as in other countries, has largely been in the reproduction of society including its inequities and injustices. With regard to Spanish and English, the school has traditionally perpetuated the unequal relationship between the two languages and has maintained the dominance of English. Thus, it might be feasible to assume that the larger school environment must consciously take on the task of equalizing the status of Spanish and English, if the dominance of English and subordination and eventual elimination of Spanish is to be avoided.

It will be further argued in this paper that the goals of bilingual education cannot be fully achieved in classroom level programs alone. Language learning is not simply a subject area like reading, math, and social studies. Language is learned in a much larger context than a formal classroom, and its development is influenced by many factors that exist outside the school. For these reasons, then, bilingual programs and classrooms must be studied and evaluated within the context of the larger school environment in which they exist.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe use of two languages in the larger school environment outside of the classroom to see if there were factors in this environment that might be influencing the language development of the students in the bilingual classrooms, as well as their attitudes toward each of the languages. This study describes and discusses how two languages are used in one elementary school with a bilingual program as a strand within the school. Questions that guided this study are as-follows:

1. What is the official language policy of the school?
2. What are the stated and perceived ways in which language is used in the school?
3. How is each language actually used in different contexts in the school? For example, who in the school uses which languages and for what purposes?
4. How does the school language policy compare to the way that languages are actually used at the school?
5. What are the functions of each language used in the school?

Classroom level research in bilingual education has demonstrated that effective bilingual teachers use two languages throughout the school day and for a variety of instructional and communicative purposes (Escamilla, 1992; Garcia, 1988, 1992; Tikunoff, 1985). In short, they demonstrate, in concrete ways, the value of being bilingual, and they provide the opportunities and motivation for students in their classrooms to become bilingual and to develop positive attitudes about two languages. However, other school personnel outside of the classroom (e.g., secretaries, administrative staff, playground monitors, etc.), also serve as language role models to students. Further, how these other key school personnel use language, as well as the attitudes toward two languages that they exhibit, may also influence the development of bilingualism in students.

Moreover, this language use in the larger school environment may also influence parents as well as children. The number of languages and the way they are used in situations directly involving parents (e.g., parent meetings, home/school communications, etc.) directly affects the attitudes that parents develop about the importance and utility of each language, especially as it relates to formal schooling. Parents having formed these attitudes, with the help of the school, then pass them on to their children.

In short, the school influences the language development of children in multiple ways. These include in-class experiences with language, as well as the opportunity to use two languages and see two languages used in the larger school environment. Further, the contacts that the school has with parents also influence their attitudes toward languages and language use, which they, in turn, pass on to their children. This study describes some of the ways that the larger school environment may be influencing both children and parents with regard to the value of two languages.

Method and Site

The site for this study was an elementary school in a large urban school district in California. The school is a large elementary school with about 1200 students. At the time of the study, it was on a year-round schedule which meant that only about 700 students were in attendance at any one time.

The school is diverse and is composed of a variety of ethnic and linguistic groups. Over one-half of the school population was Mexican-American and recent Mexican immigrants who spoke little or no English. About 40% of the school population was African-American, and the remaining 10% was Anglo with a small population of Cambodians, Vietnamese, and Samoans. As a total school district, this district has more recent Mexican arrivals and other students who do not speak English than any other school district in the county. According to the district's demographic table (1987), the population of limited-English-proficient students has grown 40% in the last 10 years, and projections are for continued growth in the future.

The school, as stated above, is a school where 50% of the students enter school speaking no English at all. In addition, it is a low income school, and as such, receives a variety of state and federal funds which are targeted for low income groups and language minority children. In addition, at the time of the study, the school had been designated as a demonstration bilingual school both by the state and the local school district. This meant that, by definition, it was a school with an exemplary bilingual program, one which was used as a model for other schools to emulate. The school had a pull-out ESL program for Cambodians, Vietnamese, and Samoans, and a Spanish/English bilingual program for the Mexican immigrant and Mexican-American students.

The above information made this field site appropriate for this type of study for several reasons. First, the school was "typical" of a school with a bilingual program in the following ways: (a) the majority of bilingual programs are Spanish/English (95%); (b) the majority are located in low income areas; and (c) the majority are located in school sites where the schools receive federal and state funds for "compensatory educational programs" (Crawford, 1989). Thus, the bilingual program at this school was located in a rather "typical" school environment for this type of program.

The elementary school had a total staff of 101 persons at the time of this study. Of these 101, 32 staff members were bilingual, that is they could speak, read and write both English and Spanish to some degree, and they had passed various state and/or district tests that declared them to be bilingual. The bilingual staff included 13 teachers, 13 para-professionals, 1 vice-principal, 2 resource teachers, 2 secretaries, 1 community liaison, and 1 nurse's aide. In addition, there were 19 other staff members who were formally studying Spanish at the time. The number and variety of staff people at the school who were bilingual was important to the study, because the school seemingly had the resources to implement a bilingual environment at both the classroom and the school level.

In order to study language use in the larger school environment, the author of this study spent two days per week for one semester at the school site. The author is bilingual in Spanish and English and was in the school as an official bilingual researcher. Therefore, she was seen as an advocate for bilingual education. The basic research methods used to gather data to address the research questions listed above included observation, interview, and review of written district documents. Methods used to gather data related to each research question are as follows:

Questions 1 and 2: What is the official language policy of the school? What are the stated and perceived ways that language is used in the school?

To gather data related to this question, several methods were used. First, the school and district had two official written policies related to language use. These sources were the district "Bilingual Handbook", and the district "Parent Notebook". These documents provided information related to the official language policy for the school.

In order to compare written information to actual language use at the school, the author observed five people at the school site as they did their jobs, and interviewed these same five people, in depth, regarding their perceptions of how they used language at the school. These people included one bilingual secretary, two bilingual resource teachers, the community liaison, and the assistant principal who was also bilingual. These people were chosen to be observed and interviewed for the following reasons: (a) they were bilingual in Spanish and English and native Spanish speakers, (b) they were self-identified bilingual educators and bilingual education advocates,

(c) they had responsibilities outside of the formal classroom that required use of two languages, and (d) they agreed to take part in the study.

Question 3: How is each language actually used in different contexts in the school? For example, who in the school uses which language and for what purposes?

In order to obtain data related to these questions, the basic methods used were observation and interview. The following school events and functions were attended and tape-recorded for later analysis of language use. These included: (a) parent advisory council meetings. These were held bi-weekly throughout the semester, and the author attended all of them; (b) parent tours of the bilingual classrooms - three such tours occurred during the study, and the author attended all of them; (c) bilingual classrooms - during each visit at least a two-hour observation of different bilingual classrooms in the school occurred. These observations were staggered so that all types of instructional activities could be observed. For each teacher, reading, math, social studies, science, ESL, art, music and physical education were observed. In short, data were collected which represented the entire instructional day for all classrooms in the study. Further, each bilingual resource teacher was observed four times for one hour each time in order to collect data about language use during instruction. Observation times were staggered and occurred throughout the school day to get a varied sample of language use with different groups, ages, and linguistic abilities of students. Each resource teacher was also interviewed. During each visit the author spent at least one hour on the playground with monitors and students; and the school office. During each visit, the author spent the first and the last 30 minutes of the day in the school office. It was during these times that the office personnel had the most contact with parents and children. In each situation, the number of languages used and the ways in which these languages were used were observed and recorded.

The above events and interactional situations were chosen because they best represented observations of interactions between adults and children. Adults in the larger school environment have a great deal of control over language usage and exert the greatest influence over language choice in communication events with students. Therefore, it was felt that observations of adult/student

and adult/adult events in the school would yield the best data from which to study language status and preference at the school.

In addition, interviews with all of the bilingual staff at the school contained questions about how they used Spanish and English in their daily routines and the functions or purposes for which they used each language.

Question 4. How does the school language policy compare to the way that language is actually used in the school? To address this question, data collected from questions 1 and 2 were compared to data collected for question 3.

Question 5: What are the functions of each language used at the school?

Data collected from the observations and interviews described in question 3 above were also used to address this question.

Results and Discussion

In many ways the total school environment at the site selected for study reflected a diglossic community situation. In diglossic communities, two languages are used, but in separate contexts. Each language has a particular social function and purpose, and one language dominates the other in terms of status and preference of speakers (even bilingual speakers) (Cooper, 1989; Fishman, 1988; Fishman & Lovas, 1970). Results discussed in this section will detail the diglossic situation at the school and contrast this situation to the official policy regarding language use identified in school documents.

To facilitate this discussion of the varied contexts of language use at this school, the results have been organized under the following sub-headings. They are as follows: (a) types of language used at the school, (b) the official language policy, (c) observed functions and uses of Spanish, and (d) observed functions and uses of English.

Types of Language Used at the School

At the school, four basic types of language usage were observed and discussed during interviews. Observation included usage by both adults and children and were categorized as follows: (a) Spanish only, (b) English only, (c) code-switching, and (d)

language accommodation. Examples to illustrate each category follow.

During one visit to Valley Vista School, an interview and observation with a bilingual resource teacher took place. She was working with a group of Spanish-speaking students at the time. During instruction time, she spoke to the students only in Spanish and to the researcher only in English even though the author made repeated attempts to talk to her in Spanish. In this situation, the language use was coded as English only (adult to adult) and Spanish only (adult to children). Even though the resource teacher used two languages she did not mix the two - she changed according to who she was communicating with. Most of the language use in the larger school environment outside of the classroom involved English only or Spanish only communicative events.

Code-switching was coded when two languages were mixed during a simultaneous communicative event. Some code-switching was observed by both teachers and students. Several examples of code-switching occurred during bilingual classroom observations such as the following event: Student: "Oyes, tu tienes una *s* word." (*Listen, you have an s word.*)

Another Student: "Anda buscando una word con 't'." (*He's looking for a word that starts with "t"*).

Teacher: "Si tienes red, tienes que stand-up." (*If you have red, stand-up*).

Code-switching in and of itself is an interesting phenomena, and was observed in every classroom in the study and during each instructional event. It was utilized consistently by both teachers and instructional aides, and could therefore be said to be prevalent in bilingual classes in the school. Further, studies of when, how, and why teachers and students code-switch are significant and could probably add a great deal to the knowledge base about bilingual classrooms. Most of the observed code-switching was observed inside classrooms while very little code-switching was observed, in this school, outside of the classrooms. Since the focus of the study was language use in the larger school environment, results related to code-switching will not be discussed in this report. However, it is important to acknowledge its existence as a language type in classrooms at this school.

The fourth type of language use observed at this school is labeled here as language accommodation. Language accommodation refers to a communicative situation in which a fluent speaker of a

language reduces their speech in order to be understood by someone who is not a fluent speaker of the language. Language accommodation, as observed in this study, was observed only on the playground and only when monolingual-English teachers and/or monitors interacted with children who did not speak English.

An example of language accommodation occurred when the author observed a teacher reprimanding a child on the school playground. The teacher was a native English speaker and was trying to communicate to a Spanish-speaking child that he had broken the playground rules by sliding down the slide backwards. She said to him, “No, no, no, do this (gesturing backward), only this (gesturing downward). This is obviously not the way she generally speaks English. She had adjusted her speech with the hope of being better understood by the student.

As with code-switching, language accommodation is an interesting phenomena. It was not, however, observed frequently enough and in enough different situations to be able to make any interpretations about the role it plays in language use at the school. Therefore, like code-switching, language accommodation was identified as a type of language used at the school, but it will not be included in the interpretation of data. It is important that the reader note that neither code-switching nor reduced speech was identified as part of the categories of Spanish only or English only use.

Official Language Policy

Although there were four types of language observed at the school, the interpretation of the results of the study will be limited to the use of English only or Spanish only.

To obtain information about the official language policy of the school, two written documents were reviewed. These were the “Bilingual Handbook” and the “Parent Notebook”. In addition, questions in the interviews and informal conversations with school staff were intended to obtain information about the staff awareness of this policy. Interestingly, the staff perceptions of the written language policy was very close to the language policy as was written in both handbooks. However, both written and oral sources were replete with inconsistencies and contradictions.

The “Parent Notebook” states that each student who does not speak English and is in a bilingual classroom must receive: (a) reading, writing, and subject matter instruction in Spanish, (b) daily

instruction in English as a second language, and (c) instruction to promote the development of a positive self-concept and cross-cultural understanding.

The classroom component of the same handbook states that, "parents must be informed of all school proceedings in plain non-technical language that includes both English and Spanish. This includes both oral and written communication." Added to that, the "Bilingual Notebook" which is the teacher version specifies that teachers must send out report cards in both English and Spanish, and must conduct parent conferences in the primary language of the parent. This notebook goes so far as to give teachers suggestions about how to write comments to parents in Spanish.

Further, each school with a bilingual program, must have a parent advisory council. This council must have a membership of at least 50% non-English-speaking parents. This council must meet regularly and must be conducted in two languages.

Finally, the school district itself has committed one district level position to be that of "official translator". This position entails translating district documents from English to Spanish. This person is also to assist local schools in translating written documents from English to Spanish.

The above establishes that the official written documents encourage and demand the use of two languages both in and out of the classroom at schools with bilingual programs. In addition to the written information, one of the formal interview questions related to language policy. Results of all of the interview questions indicated that the interviewees (i.e., teachers, resource teachers, the community liaison, the school secretaries and the assistant principal) knew this language policy well and stated that they felt that the school was a "model school" in the implementation of this policy. In short, the interviewees felt that the written policy not only reflected what they were "supposed to do", it reflected what they were "actually doing".

When asked during the interviews if English and Spanish enjoyed the same status at the school, one enthusiastic teacher replied, "Oh definitely, everyone at this school is super-supportive of bilingual education. We send all our notes and report cards home in English and Spanish. We have a very active parent advisory council and their meetings are always conducted in English and Spanish. We have really excellent teachers who are always telling the kids how good it is to be able to speak two languages." An

important note here, is that the author is aware, that through these interviews, she was most likely seeing the “public school side” of the interviewees. Further, the author was already known to the school staff as a bilingual educator and advocate. Therefore, this prior knowledge might have influenced interviewees to respond more positively to the issues of two language use at the school than they would have with a more neutral or unknown observer. As a result, data obtained through interviews may not have reflected their true feelings about language use at this school. However, the interviews did confirm that there is an official written policy regarding language use at the school and that personnel at this school are very familiar with this policy.

The ways in which actual language use at the school compares and contrasts to the official language policy and staff perceptions will be discussed in the next two sections of this paper. It is important, however, to conclude this section by noting some of the many contradictions in the written documents themselves.

First, the “Parent Notebook” consists of 284 pages. Of these 284, only 23 pages are in Spanish, and 261 are written in English only. In a district where more than half of the parents speak only Spanish and no English, it seems peculiar that the official “Parent Notebook” is almost entirely in English. The 23 pages that are printed in Spanish relate solely to information regarding participation in the Parent Advisory Council.

Further, the “Parent Notebook” emphasized the need for the school to communicate all school proceedings with the home in “non-technical” language and in the “primary language” of the parents. However, the sections in the notebook describing the instructional programs for immigrant and refugee populations were all in English. Most importantly, the section of the notebook that describes what parents do if they have a concern or complaint about the school was also printed only in English.

It is interesting to note that there is more printed material in Spanish in the “Bilingual Handbook” for teachers than there is in the “Parent Notebook”. An interesting phenomena since 100% of the teachers in the school speak English, but 50% of the parents do not.

In addition to obtaining data relating to the official language use policy and perceptions at the school, other data were gathered to ascertain how English and Spanish were actually used at the school. These results are discussed below.

Observed Language Functions - Spanish

Consistent with the written language policy, two languages are used both in the classroom and outside of the classroom to communicate with Spanish-speaking children and their parents.

It was observed that children used Spanish with other children, and children used Spanish with adults in the school who are bilingual. However, bilingual teachers and other staff rarely used Spanish in their interactions with each other. Spanish, among adults, was observed only with parents and only when one of the adults could not speak English. Bilingual staff at this school used Spanish only when speaking with monolingual speakers of Spanish or when the speakers' knowledge of English was so limited that communication in English was impossible. Further, it was often observed that the bilingual education staff would speak in English and parents and children would answer in Spanish. In their interaction with each other, and with bilingual students, English was the language of choice and preference. Spanish was only observed being used in obligatory contexts. Several examples based on observation of language use are included here to illustrate the above statements.

During the Parent Advisory Council meetings, the first question always posed by the community liaison was, "Who here cannot speak English?" The question was posed in English. At every meeting, almost all of the people would raise their hands (usually about 16 out of 20). At each of the meetings, the meeting was then temporarily suspended so that the liaison could look for someone to do simultaneous translations with these parents as she did not want to do concurrent translations of the meeting because it "took too long". Parent Advisory Council meetings were held during school time, and then translators were recruited from the bilingual paraprofessional staff, taking them out of their classrooms. The subsequent translations of meeting events consisted of only "nuts and bolts" information of the meeting proceedings with no clarification or side comments. Although the Spanish-speaking parents received the information in Spanish, they did not benefit from the social experiences at the meetings, since they could not interact or respond to the informal comments which were made only in English throughout the meeting. This was an interesting event given that the community liaison spoke Spanish and could have conducted the meetings in both languages. Also given that the majority of parents spoke only Spanish, perhaps the meetings could

have been conducted primarily in Spanish with simultaneous English translation.

Similar events occurred during the tour that parents were regularly given of bilingual classrooms. These tours always began with a brief orientation meeting conducted by the district director of bilingual education. This orientation was always conducted in English and Spanish. However, English always preceded Spanish in the narrative comments. The translation was always English to Spanish never the reverse. Since 100% of the people at the meeting spoke only Spanish, one wonders why it was necessary to speak in English at all? Wouldn't the communication have been enhanced if only Spanish had been used? Interviewees responded to this query by stating that if only Spanish were used, it wouldn't be a "bilingual meeting".

During the course of one of the tours, the tour guide for my group, who was also a bilingual resource teacher, conducted the tour in English and Spanish. While we walked from class to class in the school, she chatted informally in English to other teachers as she met them, and she chatted with the author in English. However, when she made a statement to our entire group in Spanish, it was generally a one sentence description with no elaboration (e.g. "Este es el primer grado. Aquí leen en español, pero hacen mucho en inglés." - *This is first grade. Here they read in Spanish, but they do a lot in English.*). Field notes from that tour indicated that her comments in Spanish were descriptive, but not necessarily informative. She seemed to make little or no attempt to communicate further with our tour group other than to announce which class we were about to enter.

When the school tours were over, everyone went back to the school media center for coffee. After getting coffee, little groups of parents sat together and talked in Spanish. In another part of the room, the bilingual director and the tour guides stood together and talked in English. No attempts were made by the bilingual personnel to initiate informal conversations in Spanish with the parents.

Observations of the use of Spanish in the school office were similar to the Parent Advisory Council meetings and tours. One day, at the school office at the start of the school day, the school secretaries were busy enrolling eight new children. As one of the secretaries greeted the new families she said, in English, "Can I help you ladies?"

One of the mothers replied, “No inglés” (*No English*). The secretary, then immediately went to get the bilingual secretary to talk to the mothers in Spanish. As the two secretaries returned to the front desk, the English-speaking secretary shook her head as she commented to the bilingual secretary, “Looks like we’ve got a bunch more who can’t speak English.” The bilingual secretary nodded her head in agreement.

In interviews about language use, teachers, resource teachers, the community liaison, the secretary and the assistant principal all candidly stated that they prefer to speak in English if at all possible. They are proud to be bilingual, and all staff outside of the bilingual classrooms are native Spanish speakers and identify themselves as either Chicano or Latino. Further, 25 of the 32 bilingual classroom teachers are also native speakers and Latino. However, all use Spanish only with parents and children who cannot speak English. One of the resource teachers stated her position on Spanish language use as follows: “If parents can’t speak English, I talk to them in Spanish. But if they speak English, even a little English, I talk to them in English. It helps them to practice their English. I do the same thing with the kids.” Another teacher said that she always initiated conversation with children and parents in English. If they responded to her in Spanish, she would talk to them in Spanish, but she never began a conversation in Spanish.

Observations of these teachers and resource teachers outside the formal classroom confirmed their interview statements. One morning, for example, I saw two girls enter the office and one of the resource teachers greeted them. She said, “Good morning girls, what do you need?”

One of the girls said very haltingly, “We late.”

The teacher immediately switched to Spanish and said, “¿Por qué llegaron tarde?” (*Why were you late?*).

From the above, it can be summarized that Spanish is regularly used at all school functions outside of the classroom at the school. The functions of Spanish, however, and the attitudes toward its usage make it the low status language at the school.

Spanish usage has limited functions. Its use is limited to obligatory contexts, and is used only if necessary until children and their parents learn English. The type of Spanish used is restricted to “getting the message across” to parents and children, and is not used to elaborate, expand or embellish communication events. Spanish is used to communicate with the home, but not to establish

relationships or friendships between the home and school. Indeed, among the bilingual staff at the school, the attitude is clearly that Spanish is something that “has to be done”. English, on the other hand, served some very distinct functions and uses at this school, and English usage will be discussed in the next section of this paper.

Observed Language Functions - English

English was used for some of the same purposes at the school as Spanish was. In the classroom, it was used for instructional purposes and out of the classroom it was used to communicate in various ways with parents and their children. When children saw adults at their school talking with each other, however, this communication was primarily in English. Further, English was the only language used in school assemblies and was used to give awards and rewards to students. Further, in informal conversations where more comfortable and intimate relationships are established, English was the preferred language of communication. The ways in which English usage differed from Spanish usage at the school proved to be the most interesting and it is these differences that are reported below.

During the entire semester of this study, each and every encounter with the bilingual staff was in English. Even when attempts were made to initiate conversations in Spanish, the resulting conversation was in English. Two examples of experiences will hopefully illustrate this point.

After one of the parent tours, the author was scheduled to interview one of the resource teachers. Since some of the tour was conducted in Spanish, the attempt was made to continue the interview in Spanish. Thus the first question was, “¿Estás lista?” (*Are you ready?*)”

She said, “Yes, let’s go to room 33 and we can get started right away.”

Next question, “Habían mucha gente aquí hoy” (*There were a lot of people here today*).

She responded, “There sure were. We were super happy with the turn out.”

After that, the rest of the interview was conducted in English. During other interview sessions, I asked bilingual staff which language they preferred to be interviewed in. All responded that they preferred to be interviewed in English.

Aside from the above experiences, other experiences in the school supported the perception that English is the preferred language. When students see adults at the school having informal conversations, for example, these conversations are almost always in English. Therefore, students rarely have the opportunity to observe adults in the school speaking to each other in Spanish. Two examples of conversations with adult staff members at Valley Vista illustrate this situation.

On one day, during a scheduled interview time, it turned out that the teacher had scheduled her interview during the time that she was supposed to be doing Spanish reading. She did not want to delay the interview and so we talked in the classroom while the students read silently from their reading books. We chatted informally and amiably in English, however, several times the teacher had to interrupt our conversation to reprimand students who were not reading. When she did this, her amiable English turned to a stern Spanish. Excerpts from this scene are as follows:

Teacher (to researcher): 'Oh, I'll be happy to lend you the Bilingual Notebook, but excuse me a minute please.'

Teacher (to students): "Niños, sentados, calladitos y leyendo" (*Sit down, be quiet and read*).

A similar event occurred in another classroom with a bilingual teacher. In this classroom, the interview was scheduled when the children went out to recess. The teacher had kept two of the boys in for recess because they had misbehaved during class time. Her use of language was as follows:

Teacher (sternly to the boys): "Siéntense allí cinco minutos. Tienen que portarse bien para poder ir a jugar" (*Sit there for five minutes. You have to behave if you want to go out and play*).

Teacher (to researcher in a friendly voice): "This little boy, Octavio, is really cute, but what a terror. He probably should have waited to start kindergarten until next year. Would you like to see what we do in the class?"

How the above uses of language may be affecting the attitudes that students in the school are developing toward each of the languages is a question for a future study. Studies by Cummins (1989) and Commins and Miramontes (1989) conclude that children in bilingual schools in the United States do, in fact, internalize the concept that Spanish is an inferior language to English. Clearly, in this particular school, the relationship between Spanish and English is hardly equal.

Aside from informal conversational usage, English serves another important function in the larger school environment that Spanish does not. The use and acquisition of English is rewarded while development in Spanish is not. Similarly, all school awards are presented in English (even to Spanish-speaking students).

One particular event in the school that serves to illustrate this point is the annual ESL graduation ceremony. This ceremony is held once every year and its purpose is to recognize the language minority students who have achieved a certain proficiency in English. This event is held in the evening so that the parents can attend. At this event, the principal passes out certificates to all of the students who have achieved this English competence.

No doubt the intentions of the school are good. This ceremony serves to encourage non-English-speaking students to learn English. No doubt the parents are very proud of the accomplishments of their children. Further, they are proud that the school formally recognizes these accomplishments. However, no such ceremony is held for accomplishments in Spanish, and thus the school message to both students and parents is that the most important language is English.

From the above discussion, it can be stated that English, as observed in the study, serves different functions than Spanish. In addition, it is the language that is emphasized in the larger school environment and which seemingly enjoys the greatest status. Clearly, while the stated mission of the school is to encourage the development of two languages, the reward structure is such that only accomplishment in English is acknowledged. Thus, there are few tangible incentives to become bilingual.

These data clearly support Phillipson's (1992) assertion that in situations where two languages exist, the relationship between the two is not equal but asymmetric. In this case, while the environment was not hostile toward Spanish, it was clearly the secondary language in all observed events outside of the classroom. Although, school staff tell children and themselves about the importance of being bilingual, what they do stresses the status of English. Further, the data support Fishman and Lovas (1970) and Fishman's (1988) assertion that bilingual school programs in the United States do not encourage the development of bilingualism but rather encourage linguistic shift from Spanish to English.

Summary and Implications

The purpose of this study was to describe and discuss how Spanish and English are used in the school environment outside of the formal classroom in a bilingual school. Much of the research in the field of bilingual education has been focused at the micro level of classrooms and programs. Classroom research is important, however, the larger school environment also contributes significantly to student development and use of two languages, particularly the development of attitudes toward the two languages. Studying the macro context or the larger school environment vis a vis bilingual education implementation is important for several reasons.

First, school reform literature in the 1990s consistently cites the school as a unit, rather than classrooms, programs or districts, as the most desirable focus for reform initiatives (Coiner, 1980; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991; Goodlad, 1984; Sarason, 1990). Therefore, to maximize the impact of bilingual education implementation, the entire school environment must reflect and acknowledge the importance of two languages, and must make conscious efforts to equalize the status of the two languages.

Second, a critical factor in first and second language acquisition is student attitude toward both languages (Cummins, 1989; Krashen & Biber, 1987; Hakuta, 1986). This attitude is influenced by the larger school environment as well as the classroom. Therefore, the macro context of the larger school environment is important in the establishment of effective bilingual programs especially those that have the development of bilingualism as their goal.

With regard to the larger school environment in the school in this study, it can be stated that the school site does indeed use two languages in the classroom as well as in the larger school environment. In this regard, language usage is compatible with the written language policy in the school. Two languages are, in fact, used to communicate in school and with the home and parents. The data seem to indicate that there is a discrepancy between the status of each of the languages used at the school, the quality of use of each language, and the attitudes of the bilingual school personnel toward each of the languages. English appears to be the status language, the preferred language and the language spoken with the greatest frequency and fluency. Further, English is the language used to give students awards and rewards and English is the language used between adults, even adult bilinguals.

All of the above impresses upon students that the important language is English and that Spanish serves no purpose other than as a “bridge to English”. Further, as students see adults enjoying informal conversations in English, while relegating the use of Spanish to purely obligatory contexts, this impresses upon them that adults at the school enjoy English, while they merely tolerate Spanish. Given this situation students might likely infer that in order to be “enjoyed”, appreciated” and “rewarded” by the school, they must speak English.

No matter what teachers and other people in the school “tell” students about the importance of being bilingual what they do in the context of both the classroom and the larger school environment presents a contradictory and much stronger message. The data from this study would indicate that the larger school environment is one that provides little incentive for either parents or students to improve or develop or maintain their Spanish. Further, it would seem that, this larger school environment can and does exert a great influence on the students, and that even the most effective bilingual teachers and classrooms might have difficulty achieving the goals of bilingualism without enhanced support of the larger school culture.

It seems crucial, therefore, that research in bilingual education extend beyond the realm of classroom level research and program effectiveness to include the study of the larger school environment and the possible effects of this environment on language acquisition. From this study, it seems, that the larger school culture supports and fosters the achievement of only one of the goals of bilingual education, that of English acquisition. The larger, and possibly more important goal of fostering the development of bilingualism, is not only not supported in the larger school environment, but may actually be negatively impacting the maintenance of Spanish. If bilingual programs are to achieve their potential of developing bilingual/biliterate students who embrace two languages, then the larger school environment, as well as the classroom is going to have to support and encourage the use of two languages beyond the obligatory contexts described in this study. This will require overt efforts toward raising the status of Spanish in the school and rewarding its usage in the same ways that English is currently rewarded.

It is important that school reform efforts that target the entire school as the unit of reform consider issues such as school wide

support of two languages as they plan programs to effectively teach language minority students.

References

- Baker, K. & de Kanter. 1981. *Effectiveness of bilingual education. A review of the literature*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Budget and Evaluation.
- Baker, K. & de Kanter. 1983. *Bilingual education: A reappraisal of federal policy*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Baker, K. 1990. Bilingual education's 20-year failure to provide civil rights protection for language-minority students. In A. Barona & E. Garcia (Eds.) *Children at risk: Poverty, minority status, and other issues in educational equity*. Washington DC: National Association of School Psychologists.
- Cazden, C. 1984. *Effective instructional practices in bilingual education*. Unpublished manuscript, Harvard University.
- Cohen, A. 1975. *Bilingual education: A sociolinguistic approach*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Collier, V. 1992. A synthesis of studies examining long-term language-minority student data on academic achievement. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 16(1&2), 187-212.
- Coiner, J. 1980. *School power: Implications of an intervention project*. New York: Free Press.
- Commins, N. & Miramontes, O. 1989. Perceived and actual linguistic competence: A descriptive study of four low-achieving Hispanic bilingual students. *American Educational Research Journal*, 26(4), 443-472.
- Cooper, R.L. 1989. *Language planning and social change*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Crawford, J. 1989. *Bilingual education. History, politics, theory and practice*. Trenton, NJ: Crane.

Crespo, O.I. 1986. *Longitudinal study of immersion pro grains for language-minority children*. Washington, DC: Pelavin Associates.

Cummins, J. 1981. The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language-minority students. In *schooling and language-minority students: A theoretical framework*. Los Angeles: California State University; Evaluation, Dissemination and Assessment Center, 1-49.

Cummins, J. 1986. Empowering minority students: A framework or intervention. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(1), 18-36.

Cummins, J. 1989. *Empowering minority students*. Sacramento, CA: California Association for Bilingual Education.

Cummins, J. 1981. *The public image of bilingual education*. Report submitted to the Ford Foundation.

Cziko, G. 1992. The evaluation of bilingual education: From necessity and probability to possibility. *Educational Researcher*, 21 (10), 10-15.

Danoff, M., Coles, G., McLaughlin, D., & Reynolds, D. 1978. *Evaluation of the impact of ESEA Title VII Spanish/English bilingual education program (Year Two Impact Data)*. Palo Alto, CA: American Institute for Research.

Eriksen, T. H. 1992. Linguistic hegemony and minority resistance. *Journal of Peace Research*, 29 (3), 313-332.

Escamilla, K. 1992. Theory to practice: A look at maintenance bilingual education classrooms. *The Journal of Educational issues of Language Minority Students*, 11, 1-23.

Fishman, J. & Lovas, J. 1970. Bilingual education in a sociolinguistic perspective. *TESOL Quarterly*, 4, 215-222.

Fishman, J. 1988. *Language and ethnicity in minority sociolinguistic perspective*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Garcia, E. 1992. Education of linguistically and culturally diverse students: Effective instructional practices. Santa Cruz, CA: The National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning.

García, E. 1988. *Effective schooling for language minority students*. New Focus No. 1. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.

Giroux, H. 1991. *Border crossing: Cultural workers and the politics of education*. New York: Routledge.

Goldenberg, C. & Gallimore, R. 1991, November. Local knowledge, research knowledge, and educational change: A case study of early Spanish reading improvement. *Educational Researcher*, 20(8), 2-14.

Goldenberg, C. 1990. Beginning literacy instruction for Spanish-speaking children. *Language Arts*, 87(2), 590-598.

Goodlad, J. 1984. *A place called school*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hakuta, K. 1986. *Mirror of language*. New York: Basic Books.

Hakuta, K. & Gould, S. 1987. Synthesis of research on bilingual education. *Education Leadership*, 44 (6), 38-45

Hernández-Chávez, E. 1994, April. *Language loss among Spanish speaking Mexican-Americans*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the New Mexico Association for Bilingual Education, Albuquerque, NM.

Intercultural Development & Research Associates (IDRA). 1985. *The national longitudinal evaluation of services for language minority students*. San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development & Research Associates.

Imhoff, G. (Ed.). March, 1990a. *The social and cultural context of instruction in two languages: From conflict and controversy to*

cooperative reorganization of schools. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Imhoff, G. 1990b. The position of U.S. English on bilingual education. In C.B. Cazden & C.E. Snow (Eds.) *English plus: Issues in bilingual education*. (pp. 48-61). The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science.

Krashen, S. & Biber, D. 1987. *On course: Bilingual education's success in California*. Sacramento, CA: California Association for Bilingual Education.

McCaslin, M. & Good, T. 1992, April. Compliant cognition: The misalliance of management and instructional goals in current school reform. *Educational Researcher*, 21(3), 4-17.

Oakes, J. 1986. Tracking, inequality and the rhetoric of school reform: Why schools don't change. *Journal of Education*, 168, 61-80.

Pease-Alvárez, L. & Hakuta, K. 1992. Enriching our views of bilingualism and bilingual education. *Educational Researcher*, 21(2), 4-6.

Phillipson, R. 1992. *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Porter, R. 1990. *Forked tongue*. New York: Basic Books.

Ramírez, D., Yuen, S., Ramey, D. & Pasta, D. 1991. *Final report: Longitudinal study of structured English immersion strategy, early-exit and late exit bilingual education programs for language-minority children*. (Vol. I) (Prepared for U.S. Department of Education). San Mateo, CA: Aguirre International. No. 300-87-0156.

Rossell, C. 1990. The effectiveness of educational alternatives for limited English proficient children. In G. Imhoff (Ed.), *The social and cultural context of instruction in two languages: From conflict and controversy to cooperative reorganization of schools*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Sarason, S. 1990. *The predictable failure of school reform: Can we change course before it's too late?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Skutnabb-Kangas, T. 1981. *Bilingualism or not: The education of minorities.* Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Skutnabb-Kangas, T. & Cummins, J. (Eds.). 1988. *Minority education: From shame to struggle.* Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Snow, C.E. 1992. Perspectives on second-language development: Implications for bilingual education. *Educational Researcher*, 21(2),16-19.

Tharp, R. G. & Gallimore, R. 1988. *Rousing minds to life: Teaching, learning and schooling in social context.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Tikunoff, W. 1985. *Applying significant instructional features in the bilingual classroom.* Rosslyn, VA: Inter-America Research Associates.

Troike, R. 1978. *Research evidence for the effectiveness of bilingual education.* Bilingual Education Paper Series, 2 (5). Los Angeles, CA: Evaluation, Dissemination & Assessment Center, California State University, Los Angeles.

U.S. General Accounting Office. 1987, March. *Bilingual education. A new look at the research evidence.* Washington, DC: Author.

U.S. Office of Education. 1974, 78, 84, 88. *Title VII Elementary and Secondary Education Act.*

Willig, A. 1985. A meta-analysis of selected studies on effectiveness of bilingual education. *Review of Educational Research*, 55, 269-17.

Wong-Fillmore, L. 1991. Second-language learning in children: A model of language learning in social context. In E. Bialystok (Ed.),

Language processing in bilingual children. (pp. 49-69).
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zappert, L. & Cruz, B.R. 1977. *Bilingual education. An appraisal of empirical research.* Berkeley, CA: Bay Area Bilingual Education League.