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### Linguistic Hegemony and Counterhegemonic Discourse in the Borderlands

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**Language Hegemonies and their Discontents: History, Theory,  
Bilingualism, and Funds of Knowledge**

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**Abstract**

This article reviews hegemonic impositions of language and culture over the history of the Southwest North American Region, beginning with Spanish imperial attempts to erase the existing linguistic and cultural practices of Indigenous communities. It goes on to consider the educational processes by which English language and American culture were imposed on Mexican American children and communities following the American Mexican War. Along with hegemonic attempts to subdue and dominate populations, the article also explores the myriad ways subjugated populations have expressed their discontent, from violent revolt to the creation of alternative educational programs. With reference to the latter, given the well-attested benefits of bilingualism, it is argued that one way to capitalize on the cultural and linguistic capacities of transborder populations is to integrate dual-language education and a funds of knowledge approach. Engagement in Mexican-origin children's social networks will help educators to counter the process of cultural erasure and to ensure that bilingual programs benefit language-minority students, and not just middle-class, English-dominant students. Without support for Mexican-origin and other Latino/a students to emerge fully as complex cultural beings, we will continue to perpetuate a situation of linguistic and cultural hegemony where populations are restricted from their full human potential.

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## **Introduction**

I have been thinking about, first, the effects of the imposition of one language or language hegemony over others at different levels but especially emotional ones and their accompanying discontents and, second, what probable effects can these have in the manner in which we as human organisms emerge and develop culturally and linguistically. Third, as types of discontents with these effects, what do we know about learning more than one language and what advantages and disadvantages does this have in the manner in which we can emerge as viable human organisms; and, fourth, at the level of operational programs, what can best be devised to mitigate the first and second, and enhance the advantages of the third. Thus, this work, based on many years of observation, experience, and research, has led me to conclude that all we need to know and practice are available and ready to be utilized for the benefit of populations who have been imposed upon by imperial or national language policies or forced to erase their own as a consequence of migrating to new linguistic regions.

For me, this is a highly personal task and I do not pretend that my position does not have a historical context, which I lived and continue to observe as well as contend with, especially in public discourse about populations who “must” learn English. This position, in part, stems from a very early introduction into the forcible method of learning English. For my generation, for every word of Spanish that we spoke in elementary school, we received a “swat” from a baseball bat whose end was shaved thinly and perforated by dime sized holes. The principal of the school, who was also a baseball coach for one of the local junior league teams, evidently considered our words spoken in Spanish to be fair objects for his practice swings. Thus, our daily experience was one mixed with trepidation, fear, and muteness coupled with affection, support, and instruction by some caring teachers who sometimes shielded our innocence by warning us of his approach while we filed in line to enter the elementary classroom. Others of our generation as well as Native American children were not as lucky to have such teachers and suffered psychic, emotional, and cognitive harm, as detailed in a recent work (Vélez-Ibáñez, 2017, pp. 121-129).

## **Language Hegemonies and their Discontents and the Creation of Peoples Without Histories**

First, let’s explore the often contradictory imposition of one language and culture over another which I simply consider under the rubric of part of a larger process of “hegemony” of

one population that seeks to impose its political, social, cultural, and psychological architecture upon others through myriad means—from violent conquest in the recent past to highly rationalized institutional inventions, such as “language immersion” programs in the present. Equally, however, I as well consider that it is imperative to consider the subtle and unsubtle “discontents” of imposed populations who express their discontent in numerous ways from actual violent revolt in the past and present, such as among Indigenous populations in Oaxaca, to the creation of dual language programs in the present in the northern part of Southwest North America. The Southwest North American Region is basically a highly diverse and complex region that encompasses the six Mexican and four American states sharing a common imposed boundary and ecologically larger than Italy, Germany, Great Britain, Spain, France, and the low countries.<sup>1</sup>

So let’s tackle the hegemonic process from two interrelated points of view that are especially salient for this region: first, is the example of the traditional Spanish “imperialist” model one in which one population through conquest, purchase, or other means assumes political, social, economic, cultural, and linguistic sovereignty over another. The second is the result of the American Mexican War and subsequent educational processes. The first can be seen in the 400 year presence of the Spanish empire and its hydra-headed approaches to the hegemonic control of indigenous populations using three modes of oppression and impression: the pen, the cross, and the sword. First, is the pen as manifested in imperial dictums, laws, regulations, rules, and legal impositions, which organized the land, labor, and wealth under imperial control. In tandem is the cross as articulated by the array of religious replacements of myriad indigenous practices, rituals, and beliefs, along with the compression of Indigenous peoples into missions, Spanish impositions into established *pueblos*, the corresponding reorganization of labor responsibilities, and, of course, the teaching of sacramental obligations through the learning of Spanish catechisms and scriptures. Lastly, the sword was the ever present mechanism for obedience and acquiescence and the source for punishment if the pen and the cross were not sufficiently accepted in the daily lives of hundreds of thousands of indigenous peoples.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For location I consider that the region has north and south parameters for political and economic discussions, but in reality, it is one huge region ecologically shared. See a discussion of the concept in Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez and Josiah Heyman (2017, pp. 20-28).

<sup>2</sup> Spanish violence was the first recourse if not accepted and from the fall of Tenochtitlan or Mexico City in 1521 to the massacre of the Acoma pueblos of New Mexico by the colonizer Juan de Oñate in 1599 the Spanish initially used medieval notions of fire by sword for disobedience or resistance. Violence, against especially colonized Pueblan peoples abated for two major reasons: the realization by Spaniards that they needed colonized peoples as protectors

Yet, it must be said, that as well for strategic reasons some Indigenous populations, like the Tlaxcalans, joined with the Spanish against their Aztec lords and gained a great deal of special considerations including spearheading many of the explorations and colonizations into the Southwest North American Region.<sup>3</sup> Others, of course, continued to express their physical and psychological discontent for much of the presence of the Spanish empire in both subtle and unsubtle ways. These included the very use of Spanish rules and laws against their own exploitation and demands for equal treatment under Spanish laws. However, hegemonic processes are not just about impositions since this coercion is a short-term proposition in terms of legitimacy. The best way in which to impose is to make others believe that it is in their best interests to accept these impositions. Language communicated by written pronouncements, performances and engaged participation, schooling of ideological beliefs and the reading of texts all make immeasurable inroads in the acquisition of such legitimacy in following generations. These same populations under such processes sometimes hopped aboard willingly or immediately and at other times did not, but also expressed their discontent. These expressions vary from rebellions such as the great Pueblo Revolt of 1680, which resulted in the wholesale expulsion of everything Spanish from New Mexico, to an Indigenous person not using Spanish during confession to a priest who neither spoke nor understood the array of Indigenous sins being articulated which could be quite infuriating. The point to be made is that hegemonies of all sorts, including languages, as well as, counterhegemonic language practices are “distributed” according to methods, techniques, and successes and are seldom only binary models. This is especially so since, after imposition, transcultural processes often arise, such as the development of the Matachines dance complex that ranges from southern Mexico to Taos, New Mexico to the creation of a homespun trilingual dictionary after the American conquest of the northern region (Vélez-Ibáñez, 2017).

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against such nations as the Ute, Apache, and Navajo, and secondly genetic and cultural exchange became very normative so that by 1810, 40% of the “Mexican” population were descendants of Spanish-Indigenous-African couples. See McCaa (2000, p. 265).

<sup>3</sup> The Tlaxcalans, for example, did not have to turn over their territory to the encomienda system which required land and labor to an overlord and were crucial in the conquest and colonization of Southwest North America fighting as warriors with the Spanish against native peoples. They in fact founded a neighborhood “Analco” in Santa Fe, New Mexico and were instrumental in the defeat of the Pueblos after the Pueblo revolt of 1680. See Jovita Sabes (2010) who carefully lays out the successful method of incorporating Tlaxcalan sovereignty for Spanish vassalage and without the dreaded encomienda system.

In contrast to Spanish imperial impositions, the second hegemonic process, and the most salient in the near present, is the imposition of English and American culture over Indigenous and Mexican populations. Like the Spanish version of hegemony, American hegemony was established and initiated by violence visited on both Indigenous populations through continued “Indian Wars” into the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the invasion of Mexican territories including much of that in the Southwest North American Region. It was largely religious institutions in the form of protestant and Catholic schools on Indigenous reservations and military style and often forced attendance in boarding schools, like the famous Carlisle Indian Industrial School (Dawson, 2012, pp. 81-82) that attempted cultural and linguistic erasure. For Mexican-origin populations newly conquered or newly arrived, secular public schools in the towns and cities like Phoenix, Tucson, San Antonio, Laredo, Los Angeles, Albuquerque, and El Paso were the single most important institution by which hegemony of language and culture was imposed to various degrees, depending in part on the demographics of the contexts. From corporal punishments to the use of IQ and achievement tests to “track” students into simplified curriculums or worse yet to be typed as “educationally mentally retarded,” which followed students throughout their educational careers, entire generations of both Mexican origin and Indigenous students were typecast. Testing, categorizing, placing, labeling, and identifiers (e.g., “English language learner” or ELL) excluded the dimensions of home and community from the educational institutions whose responsibility was to teach the “whole” child—except for the Indigenous or Mexican parts and certainly not their respective languages. The expressions of discontent were many, from civil suits of the 1940s, protests during the 1960’s, student walkouts, and the onset of bilingual education and later dual language programs.<sup>4</sup>

I would cite these last two educational developments as the institutionalized form of discontent generated by research, study, policy pressures, political action, and discourses of how and why language is crucial to human emergence. Such programs capitalize on the cultural and linguistic capacities of transborder populations to enter and exit different language registers, utilize two or more languages simultaneously, and structure meanings dually (or sometimes triply,

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<sup>4</sup> For a period of twenty years between 1970 and 1990, as a result of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) Title VII Bilingual Education Act of 1968, the federal government was very much the initiator and designer of bilingual education since the Act’s formation. These programs had intellectual, empirical, political, and cultural justifications, some of which operated with great success while others floundered because of lack of institutional maturation, poor funding, inadequate instructional resources including ill-trained teachers, and worse, poorly thought-out models of instruction with varying objectives and goals. See Vélez-Ibáñez (2017, p. 186).

as in the case of an indigenous languages, Spanish, and English, like among some Pueblos and the Tohono O'odham peoples, as well as, Mexican-origin populations who are interactive with Yoeme populations in Pascua Village in Tucson and Guadalupe, Arizona).<sup>5</sup>

There is a further element in the discussion of hegemonic processes and that is a methodological one, referred to as the “People without Histories” syndrome, which dovetails into the hegemonic processes just described. This concept was articulated by Eric R. Wolf in a 1983 speech to the Faculty Senate of the City University of New York, when he stated that,

it is only when we integrate our different kinds of knowledge that the people without history emerge as actors in their own right. When we parcel them out among the several disciplines, we render them invisible—their story, which is also our story, vanishes from sight. (Wolf, 1983, p. 1)

For Wolf, parceling out people who have not been afforded the respect of broad and deep historical treatments is an artifact of disciplinary silos' excluding the rich textures of experience in favor of a Europeanized penchant for reducing populations conquered and studied to types or superficial sketches to be replaced by homogeneously defined states, empires, and nations.

Such peoples “are thought by many to have no history” (Wolf, 1983, p. 1). From my point of view, such a process is also deeply tied to removing the manner in which such populations communicated with each others like themselves and with others not unlike themselves. This renders populations mute, without the seeming ability to “talk back,” and therefore guarantees their absence from a more nuanced and enriched historical narrative. I suggest that among the most persistently “siloeing” subdisciplines are especially those responsible for the linguistic and learning typecasting of Indigenous and Mexican-origin populations, which, in effect, strip all identity of potential and emergence to a standard score. Reduced to a type or category to meet an imagined normative dimension of value in language and achievement, both populations become

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<sup>5</sup> Shohamy (2006) expands the construct to what anthropology would refer to as “expressive culture” by stating that languaging “refers to the multiple ways of representation that are not limited to words but rather include additional ways of expression, consisting of a variety of creative devise of expression such as languaging through music, clothes, gestures, visuals, food, tears and laughter” (p. 16). If attention were to be focused on the multiple syntheses emerging from the vast repertoire of expressive cultural behaviors just between two “translanguaging” persons and within the historical context of the region and locality, then the “translanguage” process is indeed one of complexity, contradictions, and of variable pitches and registers not reflective of monocultural or monolingual assumptions.

flattened—not on the basis of what they know and achieve, but on the basis of what they do not know or do not achieve. Culture is reduced to a Cinco de Mayo celebration and the wealth of relationships, practices, behaviors (i.e., “funds of knowledge”) are dismissed as being of limited “home” value, or worse, to be responsible for poor test performance and thus evidence of “linguistic deprivation,” which was the term used 50 years ago, or in the present as linguistically disadvantaged or suffering a language barrier.

These two processes of hegemonic imposition, as well as the process of “silencing” populations methodologically, seem to create populations without historical value or narrative and double up renditions of “flat” populations whose only salvation comes from institutions created to erase them, ignore them, or simply continue both processes. Yet, there are also profound human processes that are affected by such dynamics and we turn to a consideration of our narrative linchpin: theories of becoming and language. We interrogate various theoretical positions in order to better gauge the manner in which hegemonies affect the emergence of our various selves and the various I’s that make us up. In a direct sense and not merely as a metaphorical device, the phrase “I am my language,” as promulgated by Anzaldúa (1987) and González (2001), best advances our understanding by being attentive to the complexity and contradiction that are the hallmark characteristics of the Southwest North American Region and are embodied in the multiple selves and language repertoires of its populations (González, 2001, p. 14).

### **Theories of Becoming and Language<sup>6</sup>**

So what does occur when one set of people imposes itself on others in trying to impose itself on another by changing its language—the means of sharing not just simple information about the day’s events, but just as or even more importantly, for communicating our senses of ourselves and our relation to those events. Language communicates our relation to what we are saying and how it relates to our selves, whether it be passionate, or befuddled, or suspicious, or objective, or neutral, or insightful, or merely uninformed and dumb. By further exploring these dimensions, we can begin to understand the profundity of language hegemonies visited upon others and their effects on the very process of becoming and self-invention.

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<sup>6</sup> Some of the parts of the material provided here may be found in Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez (2017). *Hegemonies of Language and their Discontents: The Southwest North American Region Since 1540*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.

How important this is can be partially appreciated theoretically if we borrow insights from evolutionary anthropologists like Terrance W. Deacon (2012). He, through a number of studies, addresses what it means to be an individual organism with its organizational complexities and, by inference, what this means for language development. For him, individuation is responsible for its own maintenance and perpetuation, which he refers to as “teleodynamics—that both delineates and creates the individuality that is the organism itself” (Deacon, 2012, p. 465). Here, of course, the organism is our bioneural and biological architecture and contents from the molecular to the developed sense of selves. Biologically and cognitively, we create ourselves, but in relation to others, such that the selves of others stimulate our creation and re-creation of ourselves. This provides portability for our various selves unlike a cockroach that follows fixed action patterns, genetically inscribed, no matter what other cockroaches it meets.

This self-creative process of self-sustainability and portability more importantly provides the basis of considering how agency is an expanding “built-in” requirement for our selves to evolve, develop, and to expand our capacities for the further individuation of the agent itself. This direction proposed by Deacon (2012) is in part a response to earlier biocognitive orientations from the biologists Maturana and Varela (1987) beginning in 1972 through the present. Their notion of *autopoiesis* (meaning “self-creating”) refers to the process by which each living being is creating itself as it emerges, or, as Deacon (2012) describes it, as “the core self-referential dynamics of both life and mind that constitutes an observational perspective” (p. 6).<sup>7</sup> According to Mingers (1991), the process of using language or “linguaging,” occurs only when the linguistic behaviors become coordinated which can only emerge when the nervous system has so developed itself “that it can interact with its own symbolic descriptions” (p. 329). This can only occur if there is a “consensual coordination of action,” so that language is always an activity intersecting the “self” and the myriad domains of action. Agency, it would seem to follow, is a coordinated conjunction between selves, associated others, and their structures of commonalities identified in the flow of the actions.

Yet, Deacon (2012), in a very simple but elegant suggestion, states that this “theory... avoids the challenges posed by phenomena whose existence is determined with respect to something displaced, absent, or not yet actualized, because these are defined in internalized self-

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<sup>7</sup> See this very long developmental “complex adaptive systems” approach by looking at Varela, Maturana, Uribe (1974); and Varela (1979, 1980, 1981, 1984, 1989).

referential form” (p. 6). For Deacon and myself: “*Such concepts as information, function, purpose, meaning, intention, significance, consciousness, and value are intrinsically defined by their fundamental incompleteness*” (Deacon, 2012, p. 23; italics in original). “Intentionality” is the motor for agency and when that very deeply embedded absential potential is denied or obstructed then what makes us “us” is put into question even though it is not “there” and absent. Such potential emerges within social relations in which we have to give and take in order to get what we would like because the basis of our capacity to continue to garner or give—the basis of human groups—is social reciprocity.<sup>8</sup> These potentials to signal reciprocity then emerge in not just the relationship and in action as well but in the various “selves” and “others” upon whom we depend for social identity and simple sociability—the core of being able to get and give things while simultaneously “not there.”

One way in which such capacities are endangered is to make those relationships so damaging and oppressive that the organism simply becomes confused about its self, denies that such endangerment is occurring (which is not sustainable), or somehow blends the oppressive messages and actions to become part of its internal and intentional selves, which may not be too healthy in the long term for the organism as a whole. And of course, among the multitude of possible responses to such circumstances is that the organism joins with others of like selves and acts out against such oppression through physical violence, ritual adaptation, syncretic mixing, and/or resigned acceptance, but hardly ever surrender. Therefore, language impositions and their myriad attending behaviors have profound possible shatterings and degenerative possibilities. But, more important, in regard to hegemonic impositions, are its impacts on the “autopoiesis” processes of self-creation and regulation and the emergence of selves who are denied their efficacy by ahistoricism and devalorization through labeling and categorization. I would suggest that the very process of becoming human is placed in jeopardy and endangered through these cultural and linguistic replacements by institutions, where spaces of discontent involve the shattering and shuddering of selves without rest.

But among the strongest antidotes to this situation is the knowledge of what we know about not just holding on to the natal language to prevent damage to our various selves, but also

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<sup>8</sup> Marcel Mauss’s *The Gift* is the seminal work on the basis of reciprocity and its iterations and has contributed to the creation of the foundation of theories and methods of human exchange systems.

how to expand our possibilities bilingually. For this consideration we need to understand the bioneural foundation of bilingualism in order to rationalize the development of their programmatic and operational interventions known as bilingual education, which will be discussed shortly.

### **Bioneural Premises and Assumptions: The Bilingual Brain**

In order to begin the conversation about undoing English hegemony in the U.S., we need to ask: What do we know about how multiple languages operate in favor of human emergence (rather than to its detriment, as the “English Only” proponents would propose)? In other words, as far as possible we need to track down the specific ways in which bilingual neuropathways and associations are affected, made part of, and function as part of the neuroplasticity of the brain and the manner in which this is accomplished.

On the negative side, Hill (1998) has observed the anxiety of Spanish speakers in the U.S. or Mexico in demanding contexts often leads to tongue-tied responses or muteness when called upon (p. 684). Martinez (2006) describes this process as undergoing a kind of “language panic” (p. 12), while Burciaga (1992) stated that in learning Spanish, for Chicanos “there seems to be a barrier, a phobia that is more psychological than people realize (p. 54). There is a resentment for past treatment. We have scars, and they appear when we talk in our mother tongue.” As well, Anzaldúa (1987) considers that “Chicanas feel uncomfortable talking in Spanish to Latinas, afraid of the censure. Their language was not outlawed in their countries...Even among Chicanas. . . we’re afraid the other will think we’re *agringadas* because we don’t speak Chicano Spanish” (p. 68).

But we need to know how the non-traumatic impacts of bilingualism operate in order to make a rational argument about its potential to enhance human capacities. Interestingly, according to Bialystok (2009), “individuals who speak a second language have been shown to have increased density of grey matter in the left inferior parietal cortex, a change that is more pronounced in early bilinguals and those with greater proficiency in the second language” (p. 3; citing Mechelli et al., 2004). But its benefits seems to translate into old age, in what is termed “cognitive reserve,” which seems to be a sort of protective impact against cognitive decline (Fratiglioni, Paillard-Borg, & Winblad, 2004; Kramer et al., 2004; Staff, Murray, Deary & Whalley, 2004; Stern, 2002; Valenzuela & Sachdev, 2006). The thickening of the gray matter—that is, the denser packing of

“information-processing nerve cells and fibers is an advantage especially in the brain’s left hemisphere where most language and communication skills are controlled.” Bilingual individuals, in comparison to monolinguals, have a thicker packing so that bilingual acquisition from an early age shapes the structure of the brain.<sup>9</sup>

Even more basic are findings regarding attention, consistency, and control of learning for bilinguals. Krizman, Skoe, Marian, and Kraus (2014) found that bilingualism increases neural response consistency and attentional control. That is, in comparison to monolinguals, this research concluded that bilingualism, rather than inhibiting or interfering with listening and learning, actually improves these skills. Bialystok et al. (2005) found similar results for the neural correlates of a “bilingual advantage.” They wrote:

Many of the areas associated with faster responding in bilinguals were left hemisphere regions that bordered on language centers in the inferior frontal cortex. It is possible that bilingualism enhances those control processes in the left frontal lobe and makes them available for other inhibitory tasks, even nonverbal ones (p. 48).

For bilingual children, however, bilingualism also seems to improve executive function. As Bialystok and Martin (2004) found, “bilingualism slows vocabulary acquisition but accelerates executive function development across variations in SES and manipulations of task difficulty” (p. 286). Executive function refers to the cognitive capacity to sort through a vast amount of sensory input, suppress the majority, and decide what input deserves attention. Bilinguals from infancy have developed this capacity to greater degrees than monolinguals because of the necessity of switching syntactic, phonological, and semantic rules, thus expanding this “higher order” function. As Diamond (2010) concludes: “Evidently, shifting frequently and unpredictably between hearing two parental languages made “bilingual” infants better able to cope with other unpredictable rule changes” (p. 333). It is from this early practice and its continuance that perhaps forms the dynamic basis of “translanguaging,” or “the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining

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<sup>9</sup> An important and concise work is, Perry, S. (2008). The bilingual brain. *Society for Neuroscience*. Retrieved from <http://www.brainfacts.org/sensing-thinking-behaving/language/articles/2008/the-bilingual-brain/>

understanding and knowledge of two languages” Baker (2011), and perhaps simultaneously increasing the organism’s capacity to learn (p. 299).

Thus, the “bilingual brain” literature clearly has shown that bilingualism does in fact offer advantages of complexity while having some disadvantages in comparison to monolinguals in relation to smaller vocabulary ranges if the “home” language is other than that of the major institutions using the non-home language. It is imperative to note that despite the commanding conclusion that bilingualism is a highly selective advantage biologically and cognitively, the question remains: Why has it not been adopted as a matter of course, especially in the northern portion of the Southwest North American Region? As Buchweitz and Prat (2013) ask:

Given the preponderance of evidence to support these benefits of bilingualism, one might ask why all children aren’t being raised bilingually? The answer to this is might be rooted in an outdated and largely scientifically unsubstantiated notion that bilingual language development results in language delays. (p. 439)

### **Bilingual Education and its Discontents**

In discussing bilingual education, we need to foreground the cautionary suggestions made by Valdés (2003), who provided a convincing and insightful critique of the strengths and weaknesses of many methodological, technical, theoretical, and interpretive models utilized by a variety of researchers conducting bilingual research (pp. 50-61). Among these are class-specific biases of the samples, the yardsticks used as the basis of comparison as to what may constitute “balanced bilinguals,” the tests used to determine level of bilingualism, the “fractional” view of bilingualism rendered from a monolingual premise, the inadequacy of measurement instruments, and the complexity of the relation between bilinguality and cognition (pp. 59-60). There are also other considerations, not least of which are the theoretical assumptions and premises behind the construct of bilingualism itself. Conceptually, for example, Bialystok (2010) thinks about bilingualism as a process and a phenomenon and not as a category; to not do so deprives the concept of its multilayered nuances and of its delicacy and complexity (p. 14). She states unequivocally: “Bilingualism is not like age, or gender, or grade, or any of the usual variables we use to classify children in developmental research. At best bilingualism is a scale, moving from

virtually no awareness that other languages exist to complete fluency in two languages” (Bialystok, 2010, p. 14).

Makoni and Pennycook (2006) go much further in questioning the theoretical efficacy of accepting the existence of “languages” per se, since, in one way or the other, “bilingualism” is another version of the privileging of “dual monolingualism,” since all named languages are inventions or abstractions and most emerge from colonialism at a particular time (p. 1). Therefore, Bialystok (2010) also notes that research on the concept is at best problematic and at worst filled with categorical and empirical pitfalls. For example, she states that controlled research on the impact of bilingualism on children’s development “requires that bilingual children are compared with equivalent monolinguals on specific aspects of performance” (Bialystok, 2010, p. 14). This assumes comparable testing devices that are not merely translations—a caution also voiced by Valdés. The following section provides a partial remedy to the very complex and often contradictory assumptions and approaches regarding bilingual programs, their efficacy, and utility.

### **Trends, and Practices of the Northern Region of Southwest North America**

The search for suitable language programs is an entangled one given that first, there is no official language policy established in the United States but instead each state has developed its own. What must be considered is a regional approach rather than a national one in which contending state policies obfuscate and politicize rational decision-making in regard to the most efficacious approach to the human development of children. Economically, ecologically, historically, demographically, and historically the regions north and south are first of all characterized by intensive and dynamic relations between cultural populations regardless and in spite of the politics of the region. The demographics and population concentration of Mexican-origin and other Spanish-speaking populations in the northern region began to be present since 1540 and demand a fresh approach to what we know to be fruitful learning directions established by both research and practice.<sup>10</sup> The eastern American prism for assimilation and language replacement must be reconsidered in light of research that supports an intensive dual language approach in unsegregated classrooms in which children’s home language is fully developed alongside the dominant language and funneled through intensive content material. “Immersion”

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<sup>10</sup> See especially the cross-cultural literature examined in Vélez-Ibáñez (2017, pp. 223-231).

in programs that segregate “minority” children for four or more hours in segregated instructional contexts has not proven to be educationally, linguistically, or culturally efficacious. And in fact, the State of Arizona has nearly eliminated Spanish for native speakers because of its vaunted Proposition 203 “English Only” Legislation, but has been taken to task for its erroneous assumptions concerning “immersion” programs by Rolstad, MacSwan, and Mahoney (2012). Using the state’s own achievement data, they conclude that: “The Arizona English-only instruction policy has been advanced in a research context in which it can find no reasonable support...and suggest that the state has embarked on the wrong path . . . Arizona’s SEI program breaks down at its core” (p. 203).

Such programs reproduce an unequal and subordinated linguistic position. These programs reproduce language “whiteness” and accentuate the predominance and hegemony of English. According to this way of thinking, there were never Native peoples creating grand cultural complexes, never any Spaniards inundating the land and genetically and culturally changing the human ecology of the region, and fewer Mexicans that were invaded all the way to Mexico City or grand-uncles who saw the last Mexican flag come down in 1853 in Tucson, Arizona. This ahistoricism simply reduces language to a thing and not a process that expands human viability and human possibilities.

### **The Optimal Conditions for Success**

In part, demographics determine the efficacy of the model to be used optimally. The best model for the northern end of the Southwest North American Region would involve substantial numbers of “home” language elementary school students whether these be Spanish, Hopi, Navaho, or Tohono O’odham speaking students and a concomitant representation of English speaking partners beginning from preschool through high school. It is not suggested that the partner population necessarily be from another ethnic group, but only that the partners be speakers of English as the “home” language, although optimally for social and cultural reasons it would be desirable for multiple cultural groups to be represented.

But the crucial evidence is found in Collier and Thomas’s (2004) report on 56 one-way and two-way dual language programs in the Houston area for grades K-8. In the one-way programs, because some schools were not staffed to implement the dual-language programs, a 90-10 percent ratio of “home” to “host” language was established for “transitional” classes as well

as dual language classes and then adjusted to 50-50 as students moved through their schooling (p. 14). The outcomes on national norm-referenced tests for reading outcomes in the first through fifth grades showed that the Spanish-speaking students in the two-way dual language schools were at or above grade level in both languages in the first through the fifth grades. In English achievement, Spanish-speaking students in the two-way classes outscored the English language speakers in other types of bilingual programs: “This high achievement in Spanish significantly influenced their high achievement in English, in comparison to what we have seen in other school districts implementing little or no primary language support” (Collier & Thomas, 2004, p. 9). These findings have been further supported by the work of García-Vázquez et al. (2010) on Midwestern Mexican-origin children, who assert that Spanish reading and written proficiency was strongly related to tests of academic achievement in English. Their general conclusions were that “these results ... show that continued development of first language skills enhances scores in high school. In addition, these findings indirectly demonstrate that late-exit programs can lead to increased performance on standardized tests in English” (p. 404). These findings are not specific to Mexican-origin students: Collier and Thomas (2004) also report similar results from English-French heritage dual-language programs in Maine, near the U.S.-Canada border.

At present, according to the Center for Applied Linguistics, there are 248 two-way immersion programs in 23 states and the District of Columbia, and this includes all of the major states of the region. However, many programs, like those in Arizona and California, are restricted to children who pass an English test prior to their admittance or many are ensconced primarily in middle class areas so that this most advantageous approach is not distributed equally by class.<sup>11</sup> In spite of this, dual-language programs in minority schools have far-reaching implications: students from minority schools with modest SES characteristics by high school develop high levels of academic “competence and motivation, ambition to go to college, knowledge about how to apply to and get into college, and pride in bilingualism” (Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2002, p. 2). Rather than to regard their home language as something to be discarded and useless together with the cultural underpinnings of such removal, such students have developed cultural and linguistic integrity in both languages and in multiple cultural domains.

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<sup>11</sup> Two-Way Bilingual Immersion Programs in the U.S., n.d.

## **An Ethnographic Assembly of Funds of Knowledge as Balance to Dual Language Social Inequity with a bit of Translanguaging: Antidotes to Ahistoricism and Cultural Erasure**

But dual language programs are not without their pitfalls and these must be avoided. Clearly the literature shows that in dual language programs and especially those populated by middle class Anglo students, i.e. English-dominant students, not only supersede Spanish-speaking students but teachers have a tendency to focus on the language needs of the former to the detriment of the latter (Delgado-Larocco, 1998; Moses, 2000; Valdés 1997). Valdés's (1997) early work clearly was concerned with exactly this process of class and cultural differentiation and in fact she was quite clear in suggesting that Spanish-dominant students' real linguistic advantage would be traded off to those already in a linguistically privileged position.

But this can be balanced by attention to spaces or zones that are open to student-directed, student-defined, and student-conducted exchanges with each other and with teachers as assistants in “translanguaging” experiments, where the students are free to engage in “creative languaging, drawing from their entire linguistic repertoire” (García & Wei, 2014, p. 61). This must be practiced, encouraged, and developed and made integral to the language instruction of the classroom and with students encouraged and permitted to violate curricular conventions and practices. In fact, such experimentation can also be applied to providing “literacy spaces” where students are not restricted to either language but rather may write in either, both, or by mixing or transliterating from one to the other. Martínez (2010) specifically looks at the use of “Spanglish” as a literacy medium by sixth grade students in Los Angeles. Students were able to take advantage of their own full range of language resources without restriction in order to communicate levels of meaning not apparent in either language—Spanish or English. As well, Escamilla et al. (2013) shows that, in homes or environments in which both languages have been practiced, children will carry symbiotic systems and can in fact utilize them as resources to become literate.<sup>12</sup> In this manner, Spanglish may be spoken within and between different generations without stigmatization as simply another cultural and linguistic resource “to be.”

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<sup>12</sup> As a high school English teacher at Pueblo High School in Tucson, Arizona during the sixties, I would “reverse engineer” passages from the Shakespeare's *Othello* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* by asking students from different linguistic groups to transliterate these to “Spanglish,” Black English, and O'odham with some measure of success and a great deal of fun and respect.

This unbalancing process can be further challenged by teachers in the classroom and administrators in the office who are fully instructed, as will be discussed, in the “funds of knowledge” carried into the classroom by Spanish-dominant students and their parents. What is crucial to understand is that although dual language programs may be efficacious in helping students learn the necessary skills and techniques to achieve standardized notions of excellence, they do not necessarily counter the process of cultural erasure, regardless of their technical efficacy. They do not counter the ahistoricism inherent in most instructional programs unless they are situated within a funds of knowledge paradigm that closes the institutional cultural gap between school and home, and, just as importantly, the gap in meaningful social relations between school and home.

Spanish-dominant parents must be involved in substantive ways such as in the very construction of the cultural underpinnings of the classroom and become integrated through the mechanisms of training and development characterizing funds of knowledge processes. Then teachers and administrators will be better able to counter the continued subordination of Spanish-dominant students without denigrating the resources the children bring to the classroom and further alienating Spanish-dominant students from what could be an advantageous educational experience. Without getting involved at the level of the household, and without knowledge of the wealth of cultural resources their Spanish-dominant children and their parents bring to the school, teachers and administrators will continue to shift even more of the advantage of a precious linguistic and cultural resource from those who live it—Spanish-dominant students—to English speakers whose advantages are already naturalized. But crucial as well are the opportunity to engage in and learn of the dense social networks that are the platforms upon which Mexican-origin households are constructed and from which the complex personalities of children emerge.

As will be discussed there are remedies suggested by attention to the ethnographic “funds of knowledge” approaches that have been developed over a number of years.<sup>13</sup> From an anthropological point of view there is a bias to focus on qualitative data and information in order to flesh out processes and to engage such programs as dual language programs at the quotidian

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<sup>13</sup> See Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992). This was the initial work that posited the construct of “funds of knowledge” developed during a discussion between the authors of the data that was being analyzed within the “Tucson Project,” which was an NSF research investigation of Mexican origin household in which Greenberg noted circa 1988 that these data were like “Funds of Rent” and followed by a suggestion by Vélez-Ibáñez that these were more like “Funds of Knowledge.”

level. Ethnography is at its best when it uncovers layers that others have missed or perhaps because instructional approaches often are based primarily on quantitative data. Within such contexts, translanguaging and other expressive cultural behaviors may occur, unbeknownst to monocultural and monolingual teachers and administrators. Crucially, the discovery of and engagement in Mexican-origin children's dense social networks will be of great benefit to teachers and administrators in bringing the school closer to the cultural underpinnings of students' daily life.

Therefore, linguistic programs must recognize the importance of home cultural resources and their complex social relations, and integrate or make use of them for whatever program of instruction is developed, to ensure that school is not alienated from home. Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) referred to these home cultural resources as "funds of knowledge," which they define as "bodies of knowledge of strategic importance to households"—and I would expand our original conception to include languages, lineage and historical oral knowledge, patterns and recognitions of social relationships, use of and continuance of reciprocity and exchange, gender divisions and attitudes, and values towards selves and others. I would also include all implied and recognized computational, compositional, and literacy knowledge, patterns of organizing elements and data, ideological and religious principles including ritual processes and practices, internalized methods and practices of arrangement and organization, and the underlying orientation for the basis of physical and geographical spatial induction and deduction. Knowledge concerning the expression of physics and chemistry and biologics and botanies in congealed formats like mechanics, construction, homoeopathic medicine, grooming, plant use, herbal medicine, receipts, cooking, and repairing are also salient to local funds of knowledge. Integral knowledge is that of the care-taking of children and expected social relations and their expressions and highly regarded emotive responses such as affection, love, tenderness and all of their opposites (for a comprehensive list, see Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 133).

But these are ensconced within "thick" social relations to different degrees, many times unlike the mainstream nuclear American household, so that the person one is related to by kinship is also the person who is called upon for assistance, is also the person with whom one celebrates, is also the person that serves as "*comadre*" in ritual celebrations, and so on. These are in fact "social exchange" networks glued by the concept of "*confianza*" or mutual trust and serve as the social platform whence children emerge. Children internalize the calculus of these

behaviors and relationships. Even if simply present and playing on the floor, children listen to the conversation of adults and learn much about people and events within and outside the family, learning that the social actions of reciprocity and exchange and their constituent cultural understandings of *confianza* require a great deal of patience, practice, information, responsibility, and engagement. Dual language programs, if stripped of the potential utility of these “funds of knowledge” as well as their social contexts, treat language instruction as a mere medium rather than the message, which, in the case proposed here, is one of “culture” broadly conceived as processes of learning and discarding over time, place, and the circumstances of such funds of knowledge and their attending social relationships.

For our purposes here, I emphasize the broader regional reality of the Southwest North American Region as crucial to the formation of these funds over time. How these are in actuality characterized is a matter of ethnographic knowledge, not assumptions to be categorized and mined *a priori*. Thus, for example in the original research, we had no data in regard to digital technology, computers, video games, or use of cell phones since these were either not noted or simply did not exist among the initial 75 households studied in Tucson, Arizona. Approaching equivalent households in the present would demand attention to these “funds of knowledge” since almost every child in most neighborhoods has access to digital technology as a matter of course, regardless of context, class, and setting. On the other hand, in the region there will be commonalities and similarities no matter what new technical introductions have ensued; what will be of interest is how these accentuate or attenuate, for example, the density of relationships between households.

Schools typecast students as (e.g.) “low income, 100% lunch program eligible, English learners, and native speakers,” often in abbreviated forms like LEPs and ELLs—all used as both premises and predictors of children’s learning capacities. But these latter labels will not include their actual experiences, density of relations, potentials, achievements, skills, practices, and talents, and even less of their home life and community but only that their “home” language is Spanish and a detriment. They can hardly account for the fourth grade boy who hums and sings when no one is looking and seems distracted, but also knows how to play the guitar, violin, and accordion, can read sheet music like a professional, assists his father and uncles on the weekends by playing at weddings and local quinceañeras, and knows more than 100 songs by heart in Spanish

and English.<sup>14</sup> Nor could they predict that the observer-teacher noting this phenomenon would not only be invited to stay for dinner, but eventually became a comadre to a new sibling at a later date. Thus, a trained and knowledgeable teacher who really knew the student and home and could negotiate their complex social relationships, as well as the literature on the benefits of bilingualism, would have not categorized the student as merely noisy (because of his humming in class) but would also know that these abilities contribute to the development of greater “executive function,” as both bilingualism and musical practice and learning are strongly correlated with “cortical thickening and maturation” among other benefits.<sup>15</sup> Also part of these funds are the linguistic, cultural, and social brokering roles many children will fill as translators and interpreters of their parents’ realities as they serve as intermediaries for parents in difficult as well as daily events and necessities. Such functions may increase the bilinguality of the child, and the attending neural implications can only be surmised.

It is not proposed that funds of knowledge and their attending social relationships are the same in all households, or that all such knowledge is immediately useful for school instruction. But what is imperative to know, especially for teachers and administrators of schools with large numbers of Mexican origin students whose first language is Spanish, is that the ethnography of home is one way in which the relations of “*confianza*,” mutual trust between home and school, can become cemented. Once these are established, the discovery of the knowledge base of the child may be much richer than that assumed by the usual labels and categories used to understand the children of the region, regardless of immigration generation or status as a recent arrival. From such advantageous positions, programs like dual language initiatives may be made more congruent and relational to the home and made closely associated to the goals of excellence and unfettered achievement.

The unbalancing processes that emerge from hegemonic whiteness can only be offset by teachers and administrators who are fully informed as to the funds of knowledge and rich social relationships of Spanish-dominant students and find ways to bring them into the classroom. Otherwise, teachers and administrators will more than likely contribute to the continued

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<sup>14</sup> This case description is of an elementary school boy of Mexican parents who during ethnographic research was discovered to be a child prodigy by learning to play and sing by the time he was three and unbeknownst to his teacher who found him “noisy” with his humming and almost silent signing was considered a disruptive person since his attention to the tasks at hand seemed to bore him. The field research was carried out by a team of researchers in 1990 made up of Luis Moll, James B. Greenberg, Kathy Amanti, Norma González and myself of 75 households.

<sup>15</sup> A crucial study is Hudzia et al. (2014).

stratification of Spanish dominant students, ignore or denigrate the resources the children bring to the classroom, and further alienate Spanish-dominant students from what could be an advantageous educational experience. Even in efforts made to offset such “unbalancing processes,” such as those described by Freeman and Freeman (1996), where Spanish-dominant parents were engaged in the design of programs for English dominant students, their multiple cultural and social “selves” are not necessarily made a core element of the curriculum nor are those “selves” recognized as pertinent to or useful for instruction, unlike the presumptions and premises that attach to English-dominant middle class parents.

Coupled with rigorous programs of training and learning for teachers and administrators of “home funds of knowledge,” as well as functionally equal models of dual language instruction with spaces and places for translanguaging, such a program of instruction and development would be a win-win for children, parents, community, and the region, as manifested in the measured outcomes in biliteracy and language and content learning. Simply, given the demographic realities of the region, along with the existence of huge performance gaps between children of different ethnicities and languages, we must continue to advocate for instruction based on sound research and program effectiveness, regardless of politics, regardless of ethnicity, regardless of tired narratives, and regardless of ideological convictions tied to ahistorical premises. It is imperative that Mexican-origin and other Latino/a populations and Indigenous peoples are able to emerge fully as complex cultural beings with choices between their multiple “I’s and “us’s”, worthy of respect and support, even though this multiplicity has sometimes been enhanced and sometimes repressed by long historical processes that continue to unfold in the present. Crucial for the long term is the creation of the linguistic and cultural supports that legitimate these populations as “people with histories,” with the right to an uninterrupted and undamaging opportunity for self-emergence and the accompanying processes of organic development common to all of us. Without them we are doomed to continue to perpetuate a situation of linguistic and cultural hegemony for populations who will be restricted from their full human potential.

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