

Not Speaking in English: Trouble, School Accountability Measures, and the Unequal Valuing of Language in a Dual Immersion School

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What are the everyday language practices in a dual immersion school and how might these practices influence large scale or quantitative program evaluation?



Introduction

This project suggests some possible reasons for the discrepancy in research on dual immersion education by using data gathered through an ethnography in California.

Research has shown that dual immersion education is effective at helping students gain linguistic fluency, high academic standards, and fostering cross cultural understanding (Cazabon, Nicoladis, & Lambert, 1998; Lindholm-Leary, 2001)

Other research has suggested that dual immersion hinders the development of one language or the other by fostering an imbalance or asymmetry between the two languages (Amrein & Peña, 2000), counter the goals of dual immersion.

Methods

With combined methods of ethnography and interaction analysis of video data gathered over two years in the field I explore uses of English and Spanish in a 50/50 two-way dual immersion kindergarten in southern California. Analysis of interaction was done on small trips of talk filmed by the researcher.

The School

Mi Escuelita operates on a model for dual immersion that encourages strict separation of languages: a Spanish room with a Spanish teacher and an English room with an English teacher.

- * The school is the only dual immersion school in the district.
- * Teachers, administrators, and families self-selected into the school.
- * The school personnel are committed to the school's goals.

Sample Data & Analysis

Students often got into trouble for speaking Spanish in the English class (see example). Students who lacked proficiency in English, or choose not to speak in English, were often singled out for breaking the one language per classroom rule. The equivalent was not true for the Spanish class, where English was used as a resource for teaching Spanish. These two points contribute to the unequal communicative value of Spanish and English.

Example: Spanish as a Resource for Student/Teacher Positioning

I present here an example of language use. Example 1 is the most frequent way language becomes relevant in the English class.

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1 TEACHER shh (puts finger to lips as in image above)
2 Juan what's happening
3 JUAN Candice is. Candice is not speaking in.
4 in English
5 TEACHER uh-oh
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The Example shows:

1. Students find not speaking English is worth mentioning as trouble in this context (lines 3-4)
2. The teacher also recognizes not speaking in English as trouble (line 5)
3. These two features of this small strip of data point to time spent managing linguistic communication in the English class. English teacher's motto: *"I love Spanish but in my class we speak English"*
4. When speaking Spanish becomes "trouble" it relegates speakers of Spanish to troublemakers

Implications

- Because accountability measures and language politics trickle down to influence everyday interactions, evaluating the efficacy of dual immersion programs may not be as simple as testing for language proficiency or evaluating schools for appropriate program implementation.
- Problems with dual immersion found in previous research may be a result of external accountability measures, which privilege one language over the other, and not dual immersion itself.

This project highlights the need for situated accounts of school programs, especially where they intersect with language in a diverse state like California

Discussion

Despite the goal to value each language equally and produce bilingual/biliterate and culturally sensitive students, several factors seem to contribute to the unequal valuing of the languages at *Mi Escuelita*.

1. **The stakes are higher for not learning English than they are for not learning Spanish.** The institutionalized separation of the two languages and the accountability measures at the level of the state (such as the annual testing), encourage teachers to foster the development of English over Spanish. This can be seen in the way the teachers manage the one language per classroom rule.
2. **The unequal use of second language reinforcement is a practical outcome of the teachers teaching to the students in their class and using available linguistic resources.** Fewer fluent Spanish speakers makes enforcement of the one language per classroom rule difficult in the Spanish class.

References

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