1   MAINSTREAMING PLURILINGUALISM: Restructuring Heritage Language Provision in Schools

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This chapter argues that mainstream educators must share in the responsibility to support students who speak a heritage language (HL) to maintain and further develop their linguistic abilities. Typically, educators in Canada and elsewhere do not view the development of students' HL skills as part of their job mandate. They are responsible for teaching the official curriculum and, for the most part, HLs are not included in that curriculum aside from a small number of languages taught by specialist teachers for credit at high-school level. The argument that there is an *educational* responsibility to support the language development of students derives from the premise that schools should teach the 'whole child'. When educators choose to ignore the linguistic competencies that students bring to school, they are also choosing to be complicit with the societal power relations that devalue the linguistic and cultural capital of their students. In other words, they become part of a societal system that squanders the human capital represented by the plurilingual resources of students and communities. Simply put, a student who emerges from school fluent and literate in his or her home language in addition to English and/or French is more *educated* than a student who loses his or her home language competence in the process of acquiring English and/or French. Schools that fail to promote students' linguistic talents are also failing to fully educate them.

   This argument is immediately confronted by the feasibility issue. Teachers may have students in their classrooms from multiple linguistic backgrounds – how can they possibly teach these languages, none of which they themselves speak, to their students? This issue is addressed in the sections that follow with specific reference to initiatives taking place across Canada, where educators and university researchers have collaborated to position students' home languages as a cognitive and social resource, thereby motivating students to view their linguistic talents in a positive, rather than a negative, way.

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In the next section, I clarify the terms 'heritage language' and 'plurilingualism' and briefly sketch the context of HL provision in different Canadian provinces.

Terminology

Heritage language

As it has been used in the Canadian context, the term 'heritage language' usually refers to all languages other than the two official languages (English and French), the languages of First Nations (Native) and Inuit peoples, and the languages of the Deaf community (American Sign Language; ASL, and *langue des signes québécoise*; LSQ). However, a variety of other terms have also been used and these terms reflect broader struggles around status, identity, and rights of societal groups. The terms 'ancestral', 'ethnic', 'immigrant', 'international', 'minority', 'non-official', 'third' (after English and French), and 'world' have all been used at different times and in different contexts. The term used in Quebec is *langues d'origine* ('languages of origin'). In other countries the term 'community languages' has been used (e.g. Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom) and the term 'mother tongue' is also common in some contexts.

The term 'heritage language' came into widespread use in 1977 with the establishment of the Heritage Languages Program in the province of Ontario. Funded by the provincial government for the past 35 years, this programme provides support for the teaching of HL for up to two-and-a-half hours per week outside of the regular five-hour school day. All students can enrol in these programmes regardless of the specific language spoken at home. The term 'heritage language' was intended to acknowledge that these languages constitute important aspects of the heritage of individual children and communities and are worthy of financial support and recognition by the wider society. In the early 1990s, the term was changed to 'international languages' by the Ontario provincial government, reflecting misgivings amongst ethnocultural communities that the notion of 'heritage' entailed connotations of learning about past traditions rather than acquiring language skills that have significance for the overall educational and personal development of children. The term 'international languages' was intended to communicate that, in an era of globalisation, these languages were highly relevant to business and cultural exchanges and had economic as well as 'heritage' value.

Indigenous communities have resisted attempts to include their languages within the categories of 'heritage' or 'community' languages on the grounds that as 'First Nations,' the status of their languages is very different to the status of immigrant languages. Deaf communities also resisted having American Sign Language (ASL) taught as just another HL and argued successfully in the early 1990s for the institution of ASL as a language of instruction within a bilingual/bicultural programme in the provincial schools for the deaf. Thus, definitions of 'heritage language' remain dynamic rather than static, reflecting the contested cultural and political terrain to which the term refers.

Currently, HL teaching to school-aged students in Canada is carried out within three major educational contexts: public schools, private or independent schools, and in community-supported out-of-school programmes. Public school provision occurs in credit courses teaching second/foreign languages (e.g. high-school Mandarin courses), bilingual/dual-language programmes (e.g. Spanish/English programmes in Alberta), and in HL classes administered by school districts but generally taught outside of the normal school day (e.g. Ontario's International Languages Program).

Private or independent school provision is most obvious in the provinces of Alberta and Quebec where schools established by ethnocultural communities are funded by the province (typically around 80% of per-pupil costs) subject to these schools following provincial guidelines with respect to curricular content and language of instruction (typically the HL can be used for 40–50% of instructional time in these schools). In other provinces, private bilingual schools (e.g. Hebrew Day Schools) are not subsidised by the province.

Finally, community groups across Canada offer HL teaching to members of their linguistic and cultural communities. These programmes typically take place on weekends and are sometimes coordinated with provincially supported programmes (e.g. Ontario's International Languages Program). In the past, the federal government provided some funding to support these community-operated programmes but that support ended in the early 1990s.

Plurilingualism

The Council of Europe elaborated the construct of 'plurilingualism' to refer to the dynamically integrated and intersecting nature of bilingual and plurilingual individuals' linguistic repertoires, which include unevenly developed competencies in a variety of languages, dialects and registers (Beacco et al. 2010; Cenoz and Gorter 2013; Coste, Moore and Zarate 2009; Piccardo

2013). The Council of Europe distinguishes between 'plurilingualism' and 'multilingualism':

> Plurilingualism is the ability to use more than one language – and accordingly sees languages from the standpoint of speakers and learners. Multilingualism, on the other hand, refers to the presence of several languages in a given geographical area, regardless of those who speak them. (Beacco et al. 2010, 16)

This distinction is less common in other contexts (e.g. North America) where the term 'multilingualism' tends to be used inclusively to refer to both individual and societal linguistic diversity. For the purposes of this chapter, the Council of Europe's distinction between 'plurilingualism' and 'multilingualism' is retained.

Context

Four phases in relation to educational policies regarding children's home languages can be identified in the Canadian context:

1. Pre-1971: Social policy outside of Quebec was characterised by 'Anglo-conformity' and the active suppression of languages other than English and French in school. Minority francophone communities were also frequently denied access to French language instruction in school.

2. 1971–mid-1980s: The 1971 federal policy of multiculturalism within the framework of English and French as official languages gave rise to positive multicultural rhetoric, but was still accompanied by more subtle forms of language suppression (e.g. advising parents to switch to English in the home).

3. Mid-1980s–mid-2000s: This period was characterised by benign neglect of students' languages. Maintenance of home languages was seen as an issue for the parents rather than the school, and implicit 'English-only zone' policies continued to operate in schools.

4. Mid-2000s–current: There has been a small-scale shift towards pro-active support within schools to enable students to maintain and take pride in their languages (e.g. writing and publishing of bilingual books, projects carried out in both first language (L1) and English, and so on). Although still in its infancy, the principles underlying this shift have begun to gain

traction as a result of collaborations between university and school-based researchers/educators. The pedagogical principles underlying this development have been articulated by different researchers and concrete instructional strategies have been implemented in classrooms (e.g. Armand, Sirois and Ababou 2008; Chumak-Horbatsch 2012; Cummins and Early 2011; Marshall and Toohey 2010; Naqvi et al. 2012).

The Canadian context is complex because education is under provincial jurisdiction and thus different policies and provisions in relation to HL exists in different provinces. To illustrate the fact that provincial and school board policies currently span the range of the four phases sketched above, policies and provision in three provinces are briefly outlined.

In 1971, Alberta became the first province to legalise languages other than English or French as mediums of instruction in the public school system. Two years later, the Edmonton Public School Board introduced the English-Ukrainian and English-German bilingual programmes at the Kindergarten level (Cummins and Danesi 1990). Currently Edmonton has 50/50 English/HL bilingual programmes in American Sign Language, Arabic, Mandarin, German, Hebrew, Spanish and Ukrainian. Calgary operates similar bilingual programmes in Spanish, Mandarin and German. The Spanish programme has grown significantly in recent years and currently serves more than 3000 students.

In a document entitled *Language Education Policy for Alberta* (1988), the Alberta Government made explicit its orientation to the multilingual reality of the province:

> The government of Alberta . . . recognizes and supports a variety of languages other than English and French. These languages are used to fulfill a wide range of social, cultural, economic and educational purposes. They are vehicles of communication for many Albertans and the first language of many children in Alberta. The linguistic pluralism of Alberta is a valuable resource that enriches our cultural and intellectual lives and has potential for use in the international context. (Language Education Policy for Alberta 1988, 17)

Unlike Alberta, it is illegal in Ontario for public school boards to offer HL bilingual programmes except on a transitional basis to help students in the early stages of acquiring the language of mainstream instruction. The International Languages Program, instituted in 1977 (at that time as the Heritage Languages Program), serves approximately 100 000 students usually in after-school or weekend contexts but its effectiveness in promoting HL

development is considerably less than in the more intensive bilingual programmes operating in Alberta and elsewhere in western Canada (Cummins and Danesi 1990).

Ontario legislation permits the use of HL for short-term transitional purposes in order to help students acquire proficiency in the dominant language of instruction (i.e. English in most cases). Transitional bilingual programmes in Italian, Cantonese and Portuguese were offered in the Toronto area during the 1970s, and more recently an Arabic/English programme has been offered in the city of Windsor and a Mandarin/English programme in Hamilton. Both of these programmes have been evaluated as successfully meeting their objectives (Cummins et al. 2011a, 2011b). Despite spending about 50% of the instructional time through Arabic or Mandarin, which enabled students to develop literacy in those languages, students' English literacy skills developed at least as well as those of comparison groups.

Despite occasional pressure from community groups, the Ontario government has shown little interest in changing the legislation to permit 'enrichment' bilingual programmes (which aim to promote bilingualism and biliteracy) in addition to transitional programmes. The issue was briefly considered in the *Report of the Royal Commission on Learning* (1994), which was established by a left-of-centre provincial government in the early 1990s to review all aspects of educational provision. The report acknowledged the range of submissions they received supporting an amendment to the Education Act to permit HLs to be used as mediums of instruction and they also acknowledged that enrichment bilingual programmes were in operation in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. However, they went on to note:

> We do not recommend a change in Ontario's legislation with respect to languages of instruction at this time. We strongly support the use of other languages as a transitional strategy, which is already permitted . . . We also support a learning system that places more value on languages as subjects, and we hope that many more students will learn third (and fourth) languages, and take courses in them at secondary and post-secondary levels . . . But we are very concerned that all students in Ontario be truly literate in one of the official languages. In our view, the school system is obliged to help students function at a high level in English or French, and to gain a reasonable knowledge of the other official language. We appreciate the value of the existing, optional International (formerly Heritage) Language programme, elementary, but we are not prepared to go well beyond that by suggesting that students be educated in an immersion or bilingual

programme in any one of a vast number of non-official languages. (Report of the Royal Commission on Learning 1994, 106–7)

The commissioners' failure to engage with the research evidence on this issue is, unfortunately, very obvious. They imply that students who enrol in a bilingual programme involving English and a HL (such as the Alberta programmes outlined above) will fail to become 'truly literate' in English or French despite the fact that there is not a shred of evidence from the Alberta programmes or any other bilingual programme for minority group students to support this assumption (Cummins and Danesi 1990). They raise the spectre of demands for bilingual programmes from speakers of a 'vast number of non-official languages' despite the fact that the demand for HL bilingual programmes both in the Prairie provinces and in Ontario has been modest.

In Quebec, the government provides funding for the Programme d'enseignement des langues d'origine (PELO), which was originally introduced in 1977. The website of the Commission Scolaire de Montréal (CSDM) expresses the rationale for this programme as follows:

> *Le Programme d'enseignement des langues d'origine (PELO) améliore les conditions d'apprentissage du français et la réussite éducative des élèves en utilisant les langues d'origine. Le PELO permet aux élèves de faire des transferts d'une langue à l'autre, d'une culture à l'autre.*

> ('The Heritage Language Instruction Programme uses students' home languages as a means of supporting them in learning French and succeeding academically. This programme enables students to transfer knowledge and skills from one language to the other and from one culture to the other.')

It is worth noting that this rationale focuses on the home language as a resource for learning French and overall academic success. Historically, as in most other provinces, Quebec schools have provided little encouragement to students to use their home languages within the school. However, in recent years, some school boards have imposed formal prohibitions against the use of any language other than French in school corridors and playgrounds. For example, in November 2011, the CSDM, whose school population includes 47% of students whose home language is neither English nor French, mandated that all students use only French throughout the school. As reported in an article in the Quebec newspaper *Le Devoir*, this policy was opposed by Françoise Armand, a professor at the University of Montreal:

L'exclusion des autres langues est mise en lien avec l'apprentissage du français. C'est plutôt inquiétant', soutient-elle. 'D'autant que la recherche menée au cours des 50 dernières années indique tout le contraire. (Gervais 2012)

('The exclusion of other languages is linked to the learning of French. It is rather disturbing', she suggested. 'Especially since research conducted during the past 50 years demonstrates the opposite reality.')

The article went on to document Professor Armand's view that in an era of globalisation this policy reflects a simplistic and outdated view of language learning. It also reported that the CSDM justified the policy on the grounds that, in a survey of parents it conducted (two-thirds of whom were from diverse origins), 70% were in agreement that students should be required to speak French throughout the school.

The 86 comments on this article were predominantly in favour of the CSDM's policy to restrict the use of any languages other than French in schools. This ambivalence and insecurity in relation to the perceived threat that linguistic and cultural diversity poses to the integrity of the province is also reflected in the Quebec government's proposed Charter of Quebec Values of 2013 that would prohibit the wearing of overt and conspicuous religious symbols (e.g. Muslim head scarves) by those offering or receiving public services (including education). Initial polls showed 57% support for the Charter amongst Quebeckers.

In short, across Canada, the only province that has made any attempt to develop and seriously implement a coherent and evidence-based set of policies in relation to HL is Alberta. This fact is surprising to many people because Alberta is also widely regarded as the most conservative of Canadian provinces (see Cummins and Danesi 1990, for discussion of the origins and motivations behind Alberta's HL bilingual programmes). The federal government has opted out of any involvement in relation to HL since the early 1990s (partly because education is not within the jurisdiction of the federal government). Thus, contrary to the image it projects globally as a leader in language education, Canadian policies and educational practices in relation to HLs are largely incoherent, with minimal political will (except in Alberta and, to a lesser extent, the other Prairie provinces) to pursue imaginative initiatives except when they serve the interests of the English and French dominant groups. Obviously, the lack of political will to engage with this sphere of public policy reflects the lack of sustained political pressure from the general public and ethnocultural groups to implement effective policies.

The absence of leadership and vision in the political arena in relation to HL does not make these languages disappear. In major urban centres across Canada (e.g. Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, Calgary), close to 50% of students speak a HL at home, reflecting more than 20 years of high levels of immigration (approximately 250000 newcomers have arrived annually during this period). During the past decade, educators and university-based researchers have collaborated in contexts across Canada to explore and document ways in which students' home languages might be incorporated into mainstream educational provision. The next section reviews some of this research (organised by province) that has attempted to position HLs as a linguistic, cognitive and cultural resource for individual students, their families and the society as a whole.

Quebec

The ÉLODiL project (*Éveil au Langage et Ouverture à la Diversité Linguistique* – Awakening to Language and Opening up to Linguistic Diversity)[1] has developed a variety of classroom activities to develop students' awareness of language and appreciation of linguistic diversity. This project has been undertaken both in Montreal, by Dr Françoise Armand, Université de Montréal, and in Vancouver, by Dr Diane Dagenais, Simon Fraser University (Armand and Dagenais 2005, 2012; Armand, Sirois and Ababou 2008). The overall goal of the project is to contribute to the development of inclusive multilingual and multicultural societies by raising awareness about languages and the diversity of people who speak those languages. The specific activities are designed to stimulate students' interest in linguistic diversity, to develop their auditory discrimination abilities and to acknowledge and legitimise the linguistic knowledge of allophone students.

Armand and Dagenais (2012) describe one illustrative activity as follows:

Dans l'activité 'À la découverte de mon quartier', des élèves de Montréal découvrent leur quartier et les langues qui y sont présentes, ainsi que le quartier d'élèves d'une classe située dans un autre contexte linguistique et géographique, à Vancouver. Chaque classe découvre, au moyen d'une vidéo ou d'une affiche, le quartier de l'autre classe. Les élèves identifient les différences et ressemblances entre les deux environnements, ce qui les amène à réfléchir sur les origines de la présence de la diversité culturelle et linguistique dans les deux contextes (présence autochtone, flux migratoires, etc.). (Armand and Dagenais 2012)

('In the activity "Discovering my neighborhood", students in Montreal explore their neighborhood and the languages that are present in it, together with the neighborhood of students from a class situated in another linguistic and geographic context, namely Vancouver. Each class discovers by means of a video or a poster the neighborhood of the other class. Students identify similarities and differences between the two environments, which leads them to reflect on the origins of the linguistic and cultural diversity present in the two contexts (indigenous presence, migratory waves, etc.).')

Other activities incorporated in ÉLODiL include:

- In the 'animal communication' activity, students become conscious of the fact that different languages reproduce animal sounds in different ways. The activity invites allophone students to demonstrate how different animal sounds (e.g. cocks, frogs, dogs, cats, etc.) are reproduced in their languages.
- The 'languages in contact' activity explores the linguistic consequences of the contact amongst speakers of different languages over the course of history. These contacts have been brought about through trade, colonialism, slavery etc.). Languages represented in the class are categorised according to their language families and then students research why and how these languages evolved and the relationships that emerged between different languages.

Armand and Dagenais (2012) conclude on the basis of their research that the incorporation of students' languages into mainstream curriculum promotes positive orientations amongst both students and teachers in regard to linguistic diversity and also enhances students' metalinguistic awareness and appreciation of their own linguistic talents.

Ontario

Several projects carried out in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) over the past decade have demonstrated the feasibility of incorporating students' home languages into mainstream instruction in productive ways. We focus on three of these projects.

The Dual-Language Showcase

This initiative emerged in the context of a collaboration between two elementary schools in the Peel District Board of Education and researchers at York University and University of Toronto (Schecter and Cummins 2003).