Language and Development: Implications of an Aotearoa New Zealand Language Attitude Study for Education Projects in the South Pacific

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Introduction

The issue of language in education is so fundamental that it is often overlooked. This lack of attention often extends to international development contexts, where overseas education experts who may come from largely monolingual education systems encounter complex bilingual and multilingual contexts. In this paper I identify a theoretical understanding of language attitudes in Aotearoa New Zealand, before examining the implications for both the overseas experts and the local partners engaged in education projects for development in the South Pacific.

New Zealand language study

In 2001 I carried out an attitude study of teacher educators across all subject areas in the 21 teacher education institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand. All staff involved in pre-service teacher education for the compulsory primary and secondary sectors were sent a survey which aimed at identifying attitudes in education contexts towards bilingualism - defined here as the use of two or more languages - and language diversity. The response rate was high, at 63.8% (619 responses, 395 eligible).

Some questions included a comparison of attitudes towards six different ethnolinguistic groups and their languages, chosen to represent different positions in the sociolinguistic landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand:

- Māori: The indigenous language, with the second largest number of speakers after English
- Sāmoan: The largest Pasifika[1] language spoken in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the third largest number of speakers after English and Māori
- French: A European language, with traditionally high prestige for English speakers; in Aotearoa New Zealand it is the most often taught in schools (Waite 1992b: 70) and has the fourth largest number of speakers
- Korean: An Asian language spoken by a recent small but rapidly growing group of immigrants
- Russian: A European language represented by small numbers of immigrants
- Somali: An African language spoken by a small refugee group

Attitudes towards the different ethnolinguistic groups and their languages were compared in this study through the questionnaire design rather than by asking individual respondents to make comparisons (see Smith 2004 for the survey design). For example, for each respondent the following question was asked in the context of a classroom scenario about a bilingual child and his mother from only one of the six language groups:

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[1] The term Pasifika is used for the communities from the South Pacific in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Figure 1: Question from survey

> The class teacher has said that he encourages the children to use English at all times in the classroom.
>
> How important is it for the children to speak only in English in the classroom?
>
> Very   Not at all   Undecided

Overall, the largest number of respondents chose the 'not at all important' end of the scale (43.04%) or the one next to it (24.48%), which means that 67.52% gave a response that showed support for bilingualism and language diversity in the classroom. There was also a statistically significant difference according to the ethnolinguistic group of the mother and child in the scenario; the respondents were most likely to rate this on the 'not at all important' end of the five-point scale if the question came in the context of a scenario about a Māori or French child, and least likely for those with a scenario about a Sāmoan or Somali child.

Comparisons between the six languages were made in ten of the survey questions, and in five questions there were significant differences in responses according to the ethnolinguistic group. Māori was consistently most likely to be supported, whereas according to the question Sāmoan, Korean, Russian or Somali might be less supported, and for different questions French was at either end of the scale.

A number of variables were analysed to explain the difference in attitudes towards the various language groups. From the literature I had predicted that the background of the respondents would be important, but in fact none of the background variables tested (age, gender, ethnic background, first language, other languages learnt, highest educational qualification, linguistics study, primary/secondary sector, lecturer/tutor, full-time/part-time, subject areas, years as classroom teacher, years as teacher educator) was significant in tests. The difference therefore lay in the object of the attitudes being tested, in other words the language groups themselves. This finding can be explained by Giles and Coupland's (1991: 137) theory of ethnolinguistic vitality, in which three main variables are considered: status (economic, social, socio-historical, language), demography (distribution and numbers) and institutional support (formal and informal).

Ethnolinguistic vitality of the groups

As a snapshot of ethnolinguistic vitality of the groups, some indicators using data from the 2001 census are shown in Table 1: the numbers from each group, their median personal income and the numbers speaking each language. For comparison I have included the dominant group 'New Zealand Europeans' and their language, English.

Table 1: Indicators of ethnolinguistic vitality

	No. stating ethnicity[a]	No. speaking language[b]	Median personal income ($)
Māori	526,281	160,527	14,800
French	2,784	49,722	16,900
Sāmoan	114,432	81,033	15,600
Korean	19,026	15,873	5,300
Russian	3,084	5,550	11,200
Somali	1,986	1,635	7,600
NZ-European	2,689,308	3,425,301	19,700

Source: Statistics New Zealand (2001)

[a] Includes up to three responses per person. Includes all people who stated each ethnic group, whether as their only ethnic group or as one of several ethnic groups.

[b] Includes all people who stated each language spoken, whether as their only language or as one of several languages.

•Māori

The table shows that although Māori are the second largest ethnic group (526,281 people), a much smaller number speak it (160,527 speakers). Nineteenth century Europeans believed they were bringing a superior education system, and the Native Schools Act of 1867 resulted in the Māori language (te reo Māori) being replaced with English as the language of instruction. Māori also wanted their children to learn English (Donn and Schick 1995: 35):

> They felt that learning in Māori would act as a barrier to their children's advancement. Because Māori was still the language of the family, English in schools was not seen as a threat to the maintenance of te reo Māori.

By the twentieth century the Māori language was mostly banned in schools, and children were physically punished for speaking Māori (Waitangi Tribunal 1989: 9). Research findings on the decline of the Māori language in the 1970s were seminal in the start of a Māori-initiated Māori language education revival, based around the Kōhanga Reo (language nest) pre-school movement established in 1981. Kōhanga Reo aimed to teach the language through Māori teaching and learning methods, and Māori-medium primary, secondary and tertiary level institutions have subsequently been established. Māori became an official language through the 1987 Māori Language Act. The importance of the Māori language as a taonga (or cultural treasure) has been reinforced by the Waitangi Tribunal (1989), and is considered an important aspect of Māori development (Durie 2002: 146).

•French

In contrast to Māori, there are many more speakers of French in Aotearoa New Zealand (49,722 speakers) than are ethnically French (2,784 people), reflecting its high status among English speakers. The two completely different results towards French may be explained by conflicting attitudes towards France and the French language: on the one hand attitudes towards French language and culture have been - and remain - positive, with links between both countries forged through two world wars, and French the most taught second language (Waite 1992b: 70). But on the other hand French politics in the Pacific have not been viewed positively, and the

1985[2] Rainbow Warrior incident was 'the first act of state-sponsored terrorism in New Zealand' (King 2003: 443).

•Sāmoan

The Sāmoan community is the largest Pasifika group in Aotearoa New Zealand (114,432 people), and the lower number of speakers indicates some language loss (81,033 speakers). Sāmoan migrants started arriving in large numbers in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a response to labour shortages, and the backlash in the notorious 'dawn raids' of visa overstayers in the mid-1970s resulted in low community prestige. Parents migrated to give their children better educational opportunities, which included learning English (Fetui and Mālaki-Williams 1996: 234). Around two thirds of the community live in Auckland, and strong institutional support is provided by churches including for early childhood centres following the Kōhanga Reo model (Fetui and Mālaki-Williams 1996: 237). A number of schools provide bilingual classes, the prime community motivation for which is not concern at language loss, but a desire for academic success (McCaffery et al. 2003: 85).

•Korean

The Asian population in Aotearoa New Zealand grew rapidly over the decade to 2001, and of all the Asian groups the Koreans experienced the highest growth. Table 1 shows that in 2001 Koreans had less than a third of the median income of New Zealand Europeans. Korean language has low prestige in Aotearoa New Zealand schools (Kim and Elder 2002: 66), and most Korean immigrants feel under 'great pressure' to shift to English, even in personal speech functions (Starks and Youn 1998: 9).

•Russian

The table shows that the Russian population in Aotearoa New Zealand is very small (3,084 people), although nearly twice as many people speak Russian (5,550 speakers). There is almost no information about the community in the literature.

•Somali

Somali as a refugee group have low status, and the smallest number of speakers (1,986 speakers). Somalis had less than half of the median income for New Zealand Europeans. Abdi et al. (2002) point out that the refugee background of Somali students in Aotearoa New Zealand schools causes many education problems, and Somali students find learning English very difficult.

In light of the above, I argue that the salience of ethnolinguistic vitality in determining language attitudes reflects an awareness in Aotearoa New Zealand of the importance of maintaining language for socio-political reasons, which also extends to cultural reasons. In the Ministry of Social Development's Social Report 2004, the three indicators of 'cultural identity' are local content programming on television, the proportion of the Māori

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[2] Agents of the French secret service bombed the Rainbow Warrior - a Greenpeace ship protesting about French nuclear testing in the Pacific - in Auckland Harbour, killing one of the ship's crew.

population who speak te reo Māori, and the proportion of people who can speak the first language (other than English and Māori) of their identified ethnicity (Ministry of Social Development 2004: 85). However, the cognitive and academic benefits of first language maintenance and the development of bilingualism are less well understood.

The value of bilingualism

Cummins (2000) has reviewed the research on bilingualism in education, and discusses the positive outcomes when bilingualism consists of a new language being added to the child's first language, rather than replacing it. He concludes that the research results are:

> unequivocal in demonstrating that additive forms of bilingualism are associated with positive linguistic and academic consequences. They also show clearly that literacy in two or more languages can be promoted by the school at absolutely no cost to students' academic development in English. (Cummins 2000: 50)

Dutcher and Tucker's (1997: 41) review for the World Bank in the Pacific of the use of first and second languages in education also stresses that learning a second language is more successful for children who have had the opportunity to develop their first language.

However, although Cummins states there is no academic cost to this approach, there is obviously a cost in terms of resources (human and material). In Aotearoa New Zealand, this has led to a prioritising of support for different language groups. For example, in Waite's (1992a, 1992b) discussion document for the development of a New Zealand languages policy[3], a priority list for public policy headed up with revitalisation of the Māori language, followed by second-chance adult literacy, children's English as a Second Language and first language maintenance, adult English as a Second Language, national capabilities in international languages, and (finally) provision of services in languages other than English (Waite 1992a: 20-22). May's (2001: 184) analysis of language and minority rights suggests that 'variations of approach should exist' between different groups according to whether they are 'national' minority or 'ethnic' minority groups.

These rankings serve to emphasise the socio-political aspects of language policies within Aotearoa New Zealand, reflecting the ethnolinguistic vitality of groups in the whole society. However, they do not address the consequences for individual children from groups with low ethnolinguistic vitality who are missing out on the social, cultural and cognitive benefits of support for their two (or more) languages. I now turn to the implications of these findings for the international development context.

Language as a development issue

A 'missing link' between development studies and sociolinguistics has been identified by Abbott (1996: 51-52, 2000: 219), who points out that the well-catalogued

problems of education in developing countries rarely include consideration of the linguistic context, even though it is obvious that children are being educated in languages 'as exotic as mangoes in Manchester' (Abbott 1996: 45).

However, there has been a strong 'language and development' literature, with strongly polarised views. On the one hand there is Phillipson's theory of 'linguistic imperialism', a subtype of 'linguicism' which he defines as follows (Phillipson 1992: 47):

> Ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language.

Both Western aid donors and local elites who have been educated in colonial languages may be responsible for perpetuating the inequality established in colonial times (Abbott 1996: 46). The main focus in this literature is on English and the English Language Teaching industry, because while the same issues apply to other languages of former and current colonisation, the increasing global dominance of English is seen as particularly problematic (Pennycook 1998, Canagarajah 1999). At the other pole are writers such as Savage (1997: 314), who stresses the agency of local partners, and points out that the demand for English comes from people in non-English-speaking countries, who 'are fully aware of the roles that English and other languages play in their societies'.

Although this debate is vigorously contested within the English Language Teaching industry, the ideas do not seem to cross over into the wider development context. Bruthiaux (2000) has called for increased interdisciplinarity, particularly in the need to link language education with development economics. He emphasises that the development of 'literacy, health and better nutrition, and democratisation of basic choices' must be carried out in local communities, in local languages (Bruthiaux 2000: 286). These issues are being played out in the South Pacific context.

The South Pacific context

Mugler and Lynch (1996: 2) note that the Pacific is 'the most linguistically complex region in the world'. The linguistic landscape in the South Pacific ranges from the (mainly) monolingual Polynesian countries, to the tremendously linguistically diverse Melanesian countries, with the lingua francas of Melanesian Pidgin (Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands) and Hiri Motu (Papua New Guinea). These are overlayed with the 'metropolitan' or former colonial languages: English (as in Tonga, Sāmoa, Papua New Guinea), French (New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Tahiti), and Spanish (Rapanui/Easter Island). In addition, Hindi is also used in Fiji.

The first European teachers were missionaries, before colonial governments imported education from Australia and New Zealand 'complete with foreign teachers, materials, examinations and a Trojan horse of attendant cultural assumptions' (Lotherington 1998: 65). Contact with Europeans brought about huge language loss, and

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[3] A formal languages policy has not been developed

language planning has been mainly for the benefit of the colonisers (Mülhäusler 1995: 76, emphasis in original):

> The reasons for the many acts of interference and planning were almost invariably the same: to enable outsiders to reduce THEIR communication problems and to equip THEM with means of communication that would allow them to exercise social and economic control of the colonised area. On the whole, the recent independence of many, but certainly not all, parts of the Pacific seems to have brought little change in this general picture.

However, there have been initiatives supporting vernacular languages from different groups involved in the Pacific:

•The community
Parents of the North Solomons Province in Papua New Guinea started their own village pre-school in 1979, which spread until vernacular pre-schools became government policy in the late 1980s (Wroge 2001: 169-170). In New Caledonia a 'Kanak awakening' in the 1970s included the promotion of vernacular languages (Léonard 1996: 82).

•The World Bank
The World Bank has been proposing language-in-education reform in Vanuatu since the early 1980s, and is backing a new education policy of vernacular medium for early primary education (Crowley 2000: 9, Tamtam 2004: 61). Similar reform has been supported in Papua New Guinea (Klaus 2003: 110).

•The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)
The Summer Institute of Linguistics helps to devise written forms of language, so that the Bible and other materials can then be translated. Summer Institute of Linguistics advisors have worked with communities to start literacy programmes in their own languages in Vanuatu (Stahl 2004) and Papua New Guinea (Nagai and Lister 2003; 2004).

•Educational leaders
The 18 Pacific educators who took part in the 2001 'Re-thinking Pacific Education' colloquium called for the support of vernacular medium education in early childhood and primary education (Pene, Taufe'ulungaki and Benson 2002: 140).

Critiques of vernacular education have also come from different sources:
•Parents
Parents were against moves in Tonga in the early 1980s to delay the start of English, and the official policies in schools are to be English-only (Thaman 1996: 131).

•Outside advisors
Reforms in Vanuatu have been opposed by some expatriates (Crowley 2000: 7), concerned about the difficulties of implementing the policies and the negative effects on learning English and French. The transition of oral traditions to literacy practices has also been questioned in Papua New Guinea (Honan 2003).

Sociolinguistic overviews of Pacific education tend to be largely pessimistic about the future of vernacular languages. Mülhäusler (1995) has identified the low status of indigenous Pacific languages in the eyes of their speakers (and also Western linguists). Mugler and Lynch (1996: 7) note that although vernacular languages are seen as culturally important, they are also perceived as having little economic value. Lotherington (1998: 72-73) calls for critical reassessment of language policies to support both home languages and school languages, stating that Pacific countries are not honestly asking themselves how much English their children really need. Mangubhai (2002: 492) points out that a reluctance to address the difference between official and actual policies must be overcome for successful forms of bilingual education to occur.

In contrast, the few in-depth studies of language attitudes have all identified the high status of English. Lameta's study in the Cook Islands identified an impending crisis for the future of Cook Island Māori dialects as parents switch to English (Syme-Buchanan 1998). White's (2003) study found an increased value of Fijian among high school students in Fiji, although English remains the language of high status. Shameem's (2004) study found positive attitudes towards all the languages in the Indo-Fijian speech repertoire, but strong support for monolingual English instruction. These studies therefore point to a complicated picture of ethnolinguistic vitality for the languages of the South Pacific, with the increasing strength of English creating a potential risk for the cognitive development of children facing an early transition to English-medium instruction, rather than an approach supporting the development of bilingualism in the children.

Conclusion

My findings on the importance of the socio-political component of ethnolinguistic vitality in determining language policy have implications for both overseas experts and local partners in education projects in the Pacific, where there are very high levels of multilateral and bilateral development aid (Coxon and Baba 2003: 4). This means that educational knowledge in the Pacific still tends to come from foreigners, particularly aid donors, as outlined in the Vanuatu context by Sanga and Niroa (2004: 14). Taufe'ulungaki (2003: 26) points out that the development agencies all have similar goals and principles, such as those articulated in UNESCO's six Education for All (EFA) goals to be achieved by 2015. These goals emphasise the need for basic literacy, which Benson has shown links to a need for increased bilingual education (Benson 2004: 16):

> Mother tongue-based bilingual education not only increases access to skills but also raises the quality of basic education by facilitating classroom interaction and integration of prior knowledge and experiences with new learning.

However, in the Pacific EFA Action Plans only the country of Sāmoa has identified a bilingual approach in response to the challenges of meeting the EFA goals (Foess, Pelto and Tait 2003: 33), and the central position of language issues in educational development continues to be neglected.

The historical implementation of education in Aotearoa New Zealand and the rest of the Pacific has focused on language from a European viewpoint, but effective education planning must reflect an understanding of the local ethnolinguistic situation. Taufe'ulungaki (2003: 38) states that externally funded research projects 'are usually used to legitimise the funding agents' own agendas and beliefs'. European-based education systems have traditionally been largely monolingual, and the complexity of the local situation may therefore be overlooked unless the good partnerships advocated by Sanga (2003) are developed. In Aotearoa New Zealand the political advocacy of Māori has led to an understanding of the importance of language in Māori development, but this understanding is only starting to extend to the place of other languages. It is based on a socio-political rather than cognitive and academic imperative.

When there is a focus on literacy and language, it may be assumed to equate to a focus on English (or other 'metropolitan' languages). An example of this is found in Gadd and Elley's (2003) statement in the context of a project to increase literacy in Tongan primary schools:

> While the Tongans are proud of their language and culture, it is widely accepted that more career options and greater opportunities in life are available to those who are competent in English.

This has clear echoes of the attitudes towards Māori one hundred years ago in Aotearoa New Zealand, and parallels current attitudes towards language for immigrant children. However, as the history of te reo Māori in education shows, the relationship between English and development is not a straightforward one. There remains a need for the position of English to be problematised.

Although bilingualism is the de facto result for the children and adults in the immigrant populations in Aotearoa New Zealand - and for the children and adults of most of the South Pacific - a focus only on vernacular maintenance, or only on English acquisition, overlooks the possibility of bilingualism as an outcome. Planning for additive forms of bilingualism (or multilingualism) will provide not only social and cultural benefits for children and their communities, but also the well-proven academic and cognitive benefits.

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