

Research on the social and economic value of multilingualism

19 October 2012

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview of the submission

This supplementary submission has been prepared in response to a request from the Education and Science Select Committee during the TESOLANZ submission at hearings for the inquiry.

The paper first gives an explanation of the background to current research on the social and economic value of multilingualism, before turning to areas of research into this topic, with the main international and local findings. The majority of the research is available online (links are provided in the reference list), or can be provided on request.

1.2 Summary of key research findings

High levels of multilingualism are the norm internationally, and the phenomenon of super-diversity provides new research challenges. The economic and social value of multilingualism is approached in a number of ways by social researchers, with the following key international findings:

- The “multilingual brain” provides advantages to individuals, and may provide wider benefits to society such as through enhanced contribution to work-teams;
- Bilingually schooled children have been found to have educational advantages over monolingually schooled children in all subject areas;
- A strong cultural and linguistic identity in minority groups is considered to be a contributor to social stability and cohesion;
- Cultural and linguistic resources can be viewed as a form of capital, providing benefits in the modern transnational world; and
- Multilingualism has been associated with the creation of economic value.

2 Background

2.1 Terminology

Multilingualism in this paper includes *bilingualism*, and refers to the use of two or more languages at societal level, as well as individual level (at individual level this is sometimes called *plurilingualism*).

2.2 Scope

In line with the focus of the inquiry, the focus of the paper is on multilingualism as it applies to Pasifika communities, but it should be noted that the findings also apply to Māori and other cultural and linguistic groups in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.3 Linguistic diversity

In nearly all countries of the world there are high levels of multilingualism. The levels in each country can be compared by their rates of *linguistic diversity*. Aotearoa New Zealand is ranked 175 out of 224 countries for linguistic diversity in the population, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Linguistic diversity in the population (selected countries)
Adapted from *Ethnologue*, online version (Lewis, 2009).

Country	World linguistic diversity ranking (total = 224)	No. of indigenous languages	No. of immigrant languages
Papua New Guinea	1	830	0
Canada	71	86	83
China	99	292	4
United States	135	176	188
United Kingdom	171	12	44
Australia	173	161	46
New Zealand	175	4	18
Vatican State	224	1	0

2.4 Super-diversity

However, the table is based on 1980s data and is likely to show lower levels of linguistic diversity than those currently existing in New Zealand, since more recent census data shows that the number of multilingual speakers has been increasing¹. This increase reflects the notion of *super-diversity* (Vertec, 2007), which characterises twenty-first century cities with high levels of immigration and multicultural diversity such as London, and Auckland (see Spoonley and Butcher, 2009). The different immigrant groups bring their own languages, so high levels of multilingualism result when there is super-diversity, which is regarded as a significant challenge for social research.

3 Research themes

Research approaches to the value of multilingualism reflect a number of different perspectives on multicultural diversity in society.

3.1 Cognitive ability

The cognitive effects of “the multilingual brain” have been well-researched, and show a number of benefits such as creative and divergent thinking for individuals (Baker, 2011, p. 151). Recent findings include suggestions that lifelong bilingualism delays the onset of Alzheimer disease (Craik, Bialystok, and Freedman, 2010); that bilingualism in adolescents fine-tunes their hearing ability and enhances their attention (Krizman et al., 2012); and that thinking in a foreign language reduces bias in decision-making (Keysar, Hayakawa, and An, 2012).

These benefits have then been linked by some researchers to social and economic benefits such as creativity and higher productivity in work-teams, although the ability to realise the benefit of this in work places undoubtedly depends on many factors.

¹ Statistics New Zealand, 2006 *Census QuickStats, Language*:

The number of multilingual (people who can speak two or more languages) has continued to increase. Between the 2001 and 2006 censuses, the number of multilingual people increased by 19.5 percent, to reach 671,658 people. In the ten years between 1996 and 2006, this number increased by 43.3 percent, from 468,711 people in 1996 to reach 671,658 people in 2006.

3.2 Educational achievement

Educational programmes which focus on maintaining the student's first languages as well as adding a second language such as English have the aim of *additive* bilingualism, rather than *subtractive* bilingualism (in which the first language is eventually replaced by the second). This has a social justice dimension, and programmes which successfully take a social justice approach for multilingual education in a variety of international contexts are described by Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson, Mohanty, and Panda (2009).

There is clear international evidence that language minority children in additive bilingual programmes achieve higher levels of academic success. An overview of the research findings can be found in May (2008). One of the most convincing studies is Thomas and Collier's (2002) five-year national study in the United States which had a number of findings supporting bilingual education for students from language minority groups (such as Spanish-speaking immigrants), including that bilingually schooled children outperformed comparable monolingually schooled children in all subjects.

In a review for the New Zealand Ministry of Education, May, Hill and Tiakiwai (2004, p. 75) note that language maintenance models are not common in Aotearoa New Zealand education, partly because of the sizes of immigrant population groups. The low levels of achievement of Pasifika students in Aotearoa New Zealand indicate that there is an urgent need for evidence-based programmes of language support, which led to the design of LEAP (Language Enhancing the Achievement of Pasifika) resource (McComish, May and Franken, 2006) for teachers of Pasifika students (May, 2011). However, there has been no formal evaluation of the programme.

3.3 Social stability and cohesion

The 1992 United Nations *Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*, of which New Zealand is a signatory, states that the promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities contributes to "the political and social stability of States in which they live", and emphasises that this would "contribute to the strengthening of friendship and cooperation among peoples and States". The declaration sets out educational requirements to meet these goals (United Nations, 1992)².

The Ministry of Social Development's (2008) *Diverse communities - Exploring the migrant and refugee experience in New Zealand* report used the framework of social cohesion developed by Spoonley, Peace, Butcher and O'Neill (2005), which includes two language indicators in the dimension of "recognition": first language retention, and the prevalence of migrant media. The report does not fully endorse the inclusion of these indicators for social cohesion, labelling them "ambiguous" (Ministry of Social Development, 2008, p. 101), which appears to be in contrast with the human rights approach and shows the complexities involved in such analyses.

New Zealand's *Social Reports* included indicators of wellbeing from census data of Māori language and the retention first languages other than English, and highlighting the value of cultural identity (Ministry of Social Development, 2011, pp. 88-89):

The ability of people to speak the language of their identified ethnicity is an indicator of the ability of ethnic groups to retain and pass on their culture and traditions to future generations. Language is a central component of cultural identity.

² The relevant clauses from Article 4 of the Declaration state that:

States should take appropriate measures so that, wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities may have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue.

States should, where appropriate, take measures in the field of education, in order to encourage knowledge of the history, traditions, language and culture of the minorities existing within their territory. Persons belonging to minorities should have adequate opportunities to gain knowledge of the society as a whole.

However, the more recent *New Zealand General Social Survey* does not include any indicators about language in the social cohesion section (Statistics New Zealand, 2011).

3.4 *Cultural and linguistic capital*

The concepts of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu have been useful in analysing the language of immigrant families, particularly in terms of the *transnationalism* which is now possible with new modes of international travel and communication. As families can move readily back and forth between their country of origin and country of settlement, their cultural and linguistic capital can become “global, national and personal resources” (Taylor, Bernhard, Garg, and Cummins, 2008, p. 269). Viewing language and culture as types of “capital” is useful for analysing the different kinds of status, or value, held by different languages in different situations.

There are now well-established Pacific communities in Pacific rim countries and beyond, to which cultural and linguistic capital can be valuable, as described by Lee (2009, p. 1) in a collection of papers on Pacific transnationalism:

For Pacific Islanders, transnationalism involves the multidirectional movement of people, money, goods of many different kinds, artefacts, ideas and symbols, and involves individuals, families, groups and institutions.

3.5 *Economic benefits*

An overview of the economics approach to language issues has been outlined by Grin (2003), in which he discusses market and non-market value of language, at the private and society levels. He advocates more rigorous economic analyses of language in order to inform language policy. In a three-year Swiss study of multilingualism at work, Grin, Sfreddo and Vaillancourt (2010) found the value of multilingualism in the form of foreign language skills to be pervasive in terms of economic outcomes (productivity, costs, and profits). They propose that their findings would also be relevant in other countries which engage in international business (p. 121).

In New Zealand, a cost/benefit analysis of the first four years of Victoria University's Skilled Migrant Programme found very high net benefits as a result of removing the “blocks” preventing migrants of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds from participating in the economy (Prebble, 2006). It would be useful to apply the formal economic models used by Grin and others to the wider social and linguistic context in Aotearoa New Zealand.

4 **Summary and conclusions**

The increase in linguistic diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand means that contextualised research is needed across the range of approaches in order to better inform policy and practice. However, there is little doubt that overall social science research to date suggests that young Pasifika people will achieve better learning and social outcomes if they are in an environment where their home language is used alongside New Zealand English.

Contact

For further information on this submission, please contact:

Dr Hilary Smith (President)
hilary_smith@xtra.co.nz
06 353-6357, 021 353-607

References

- Baker, C. (2011). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism*, 5th ed. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Craik, F. I. M., Bialystok, E., & Freedman, M. (2010). Delaying the onset of Alzheimer disease: Bilingualism as a form of cognitive reserve. *Neurology*, 75 (19), 1726-1729.
- Grin, F. (2003). Language planning and economics. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 4(1), 1-66.
- Grin, F., Sfreddo, & Vaillancourt. (2010). *The economics of the multilingual workplace*. New York: Routledge.
- Keysar, B., Hayakawa, S. L., & An, S. G. (2012). The foreign-language effect: Thinking in a foreign tongue reduces decision biases. *Psychological Science*, 23 (6), 661-668.
- Krizman, J., Viorica, M., Shook, A., Skoe, E., & Kraus, N. (2012). Subcortical encoding of sound is enhanced in bilinguals and relates to executive function advantages. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 109 (20), 7877-7881.
- Lee, H. (2009). Introduction. In H. Lee & S. Tupai Francis (Eds.), *Migration and transnationalism: Pacific perspectives*, pp. 1-6. ANU E-Press. Available at <http://epress.anu.edu.au/titles/migration-and-transnationalism>
- Lewis, M. P. (Ed.). (2009). *Ethnologue*, 16th Edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version available at <http://www.ethnologue.com>
- May, S. (2008). Bilingual/immersion education: What the research tells us. In J. Cummins and N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*, 2nd Edition, Volume 5 Bilingual Education, 1-16. Springer Science.
- May, S. (2011). The disciplinary constraints of SLA and TESOL: Additive bilingualism and second language acquisition, teaching and learning. *Linguistics and Education*, 22, 233-247.
- May, S., Hill, R., & Tiakiwai, S. (2004). *Bilingual/immersion education: Indicators of good practice*. Final report to the Ministry of Education. Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, School of Education, Waikato University. Available at <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz>
- McComish, J., May, S., & Franken, M. (2006). *Language Enhancing the Achievement of Pasifika (LEAP)*. Ministry of Education. Available at <http://leap.tki.org.nz/>
- Ministry of Social Development. (2008). *Diverse communities - Exploring the migrant and refugee experience in New Zealand*. Social Policy Group. Available at <http://www.msd.govt.nz>
- Ministry of Social Development. (2011). *Social Report 2010: Te pūrongo oranga tangata*. Available at <http://www.msd.govt.nz>
- Prebble, J. (2006). *A cost/benefit Analysis of the Skilled Migrant Programme: 2005 – 2008*, Victoria University of Wellington, the Rotary Club of Wellington, and The Johnson Group Ltd. Available at <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/lwp/docs/ops/OP9.pdf>
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T., Phillipson, R., Mohanty, A. K., & Panda, M. (2009). *Social justice through multilingual education*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Spoonley, P., & Butcher, A. (2009). Reporting superdiversity: The mass media and immigration in New Zealand. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 30(4), 335-372.
- Spoonley, P., Peace, R., Butcher, A., & O'Neill, D. (2005). Social cohesion: A policy and indicator framework for assessing immigrant and host outcomes. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, 24, 85-110. Available at <http://www.msd.govt.nz>
- Statistics New Zealand. (2011). *Social cohesion in New Zealand: Facts from the New Zealand General Social Survey 2008*. Available at <http://www.stats.govt.nz/nzgss>

- Statistics New Zealand. (n.d.). *Census 2006 QuickStats: Language*. Available at <http://www.stats.govt.nz>
- Taylor, L. K., Bernhard, J. K., Garg, S., & Cummins, J. (2008). Affirming plural belonging: Building on students' family-based cultural and linguistic capital through multiliteracies pedagogy. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 8(30), 269-294.
- Thomas, W.P., & Collier, V.P. (2002). *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement*. Santa Cruz, CA: Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence, University of California-Santa Cruz. Available at http://repositories.cdlib.org/crede/finalrpts/1_1_final
- United Nations. (1992). *Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*, 18 December, Resolution 47/135. Available at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/minorities.htm>
- Vertec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(6), pp. 1024-1054.