

Book Review

Miranda, Norbella, Anne-Marie de Mejía and Silvia Valencia Giraldo (eds.).

Language Education in Multilingual Colombia: Critical perspectives and voices from the field.

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Language Education in Multilingual Colombia is an important volume that brings together expertise from a number of scholars around four key topics: 1. *Creole and Indigenous Languages in Colombia*; 2. *Language Education Policy: Discourses, ideologies and local practices*; 3. *Interculturality and Pedagogy*; 4. *Reimagining Teacher Education: Taking account of diversities and inequalities*. Each of these topics is addressed in a distinct section representing an area of research that has engaged with questions of language education and multilingualism in Colombia. Each section begins with an introduction from an international scholar with ongoing links to the Colombian context, these mini-discussions help to put a sense of dialogue at the very heart of the volume; the most powerful of which is created between these four lines of research that have existed all but independently of each other and which allows the volume to grapple with the unresolved question of the status of English and English language teaching within Colombia's multilingualism.

The volume opens with an introduction from the editors (de Mejía, Valencia Giraldo and Miranda) in which they introduce Colombia's multilingualism and make explicit the aim of bringing together, into one place, debates and discussions that have been going on in Colombia for a number of years. This is followed by an essential contextualization chapter (Valencia Giraldo, Miranda and de Mejía) that consolidates knowledge about the diversity of languages spoken across the territory of Colombia, locating each of them historically, socially and geographically. This chapter offers an important complexification of, and elaboration on, the frequently cited fact that Colombia is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in Latin America.

Section 1 then hones in on, and gives much needed primacy to, Colombia's oft-overlooked indigenous and creole languages. In the section introduction, López-Gopar highlights the ongoing impact of colonization in relation to the standing of indigenous and creole languages and is keen to focus attention on the projects of language maintenance, revitalization and decolonial resistance that are being enacted by speakers of these minoritized languages.

One such example of these processes of maintenance is detailed in Sanmiguel Ardilla's Chapter 2. The author explores the failure of top-down policies for safeguarding Kriol, the English creole language spoken on Colombia's Caribbean Archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina. She argues that the legal framework of recognition of Kriol that was made possible under Colombia's 1991 constitution, has not been effective, evidencing negative language ideologies and attitudes around Kriol and arguing the need of a bottom-up approach to halting language shift.

In Chapter 3, Navarro Díaz, Salgado Reyes and Palomino Cassiani document another example of language maintenance and revitalization, this time in relation to Palenquero, a Spanish-based creole language that emerged as a result of the trading of enslaved people. The authors document different strategies for preserving and promoting Palenquero as an important aspect of speakers' cultural identity. In particular they highlight the importance of culturally salient teaching methods (e.g. talking circles) and the power of intergenerational transmission enabled through the integration of community elders that have been adopted by teachers working within the framework of *etnoeducación* – the state-directed provision for territory-based bilingual education that applies to indigenous languages.

The appropriacy of *etnoeducación* is the subject of Chapter 4 in which Triviño Garzón and Rojas Curieux suggest the possibility of an alternative indigenous education system, independent from the top-down *etnoeducación*. Taking the case of the Department of Cauca, notable for the presence of indigenous territories, they argue for the importance of both education and indigenous ways of knowing for ensuring the continued transmission of indigenous languages and cultures. Whilst the authors lament the lack of teacher education programmes dedicated to indigenous languages, they are not pessimistic. Rather, they end this section with a call to align research practice to the needs of indigenous communities in which, they claim, the decisions about language revitalization and teaching need to be made.

The implicit backdrop to the increasing minoritization of creole and indigenous languages is made explicit in the introduction to Section 2 in which Cassels Johnson sets out how language education policies that focus on English can contribute to language shift away from so-called 'Colombian languages'. The introduction to this section also makes important links to scholarship produced by critical applied linguists in other latitudes, thus broadening the scope of the implications brought in by this author.

Chapter 5 sets the tone for this section by focusing on teachers' appropriation of English language education policy discourses. Miranda and Valencia Giraldo give an overview of the developments in Colombia's English Language Teaching (ELT) policy before focusing on two key moments in this policy implementation (1999–2004; 2012–2018). Bringing together data from two different ethnographic classroom

experiences, the authors are able to show the importance of teachers' appropriation of the ELT policy and the value of centring micro-practices such as strategic choice of language and teaching activities, that have until now been overlooked in the various stages of the policy renewal.

Teachers' positioning in light of ELT policy is the focus of Chapter 6, in which Cruz Arcila documents the experience of a high school English teacher in rural Colombia. This chapter adds a much-needed focus on rural education to this section, a context that is often overlooked in much scholarship about ELT in Colombia. In terms of data, Cruz Arcila reproduces an extended narrative of the schoolteacher Ana in which she recounts her experience teaching in a rural context during the country's armed conflict. The inclusion of this moving narrative, in full, is a high-point in the volume and demonstrates the value of holding space for teachers' voices. Analytically, the reflections this leads to are important in rejecting the technified, dehumanized, concept of ELT considered to be central to Colombia's ELT policy (see Usma Wilches 2015).

This technified concept of ELT comes under scrutiny further in Chapter 7, as Ortega explores the role of late capitalism on the commodification of English in Colombia. Drawing on a critical ethnographic case study, Ortega argues that dominant neoliberal discourses around English as commodity dehumanize learners. However, in keeping with the other chapters in this section, he chooses to highlight moments where teachers use their agency to reintroduce the human aspect to teaching, he shows that English classes are spaces where teachers *are* attuned to students' needs to learn English, but they also keep in mind students' realities and respond to them through ELT with a commitment to social justice.

The role of teachers in negotiating the implementation of ELT policy is further taken up in Chapter 8, in which González explores the circulating discourses about the low level of English in Colombia. González denounces how blame for this is often laid at the feet of English language teachers for their language proficiency and their teaching methodology. She goes on to show how these discourses have given rise to the continual reliance on so-called 'native speaker teachers'. González contests these discourses by highlighting that Colombia's low level of English could just as easily be explained by the lack of qualified teachers and the suboptimal material conditions in which teachers work. She closes the chapter with a purposeful redressing of these negative discourses by citing numerous studies which show Colombian teachers of English demonstrating teaching excellence.

Section 3 opens with a reflection into the development of interculturality from Liddicoat. He makes clear the differing concepts of culture, and thus interculturality, latent in *etnoeducación* and Colombian ELT and suggests a move away from fixed understandings of culture and cultural difference. He calls for a hermeneutic

approach to interculturality where we can make sense of each other's lived experiences through interpretation and reflection.

This call is echoed in Chapter 9 by Álvarez Valencia, who claims that foreign and second language education needs to build a more nuanced and complex understanding of interculturality. He highlights the importance of diversity and inclusion in schools in relation to a number of axes including gender and sexuality, (dis)ability, and for the specific case of ex-combatants and Venezuelan migrants in Colombian schools. The author argues that by decentring a Western concept of language as the main carrier of meaning and taking into account the plurality of semiotic resources that individuals bring to an encounter, second and foreign language classrooms are a privileged space to foster a more democratic, intercultural space.

The possibility of using the English language class to foster interculturality is explored empirically in Chapter 10. In this contribution, Peña Dix presents the findings of a research project into English teachers' views interculturality and what they considered necessary in order to achieve 'Intercultural ELT' (IELT). Whilst the results showed a range of understandings of interculturality, a common theme was a reliance on foreign languages and cultures, rather than Colombia's own cultural diversity, to make sense of this. She finds that there is an emergent tendency towards creating cultural 'third spaces' in English classes, but that teachers lack some of the conceptual clarity that would help them do so more effectively. She also makes a case for the importance of teacher reflexivity in moving towards IELT and promotes this as a possible approach in teacher education programmes.

Chapter 11 hones in on the teacher education implications of interculturality. Tejada-Sánchez and de Mejía investigate the extent to which participation in a multilingual Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), the product of an international action research project, fostered reflexivity and criticality in teachers' implementation of interculturality. The study found that teachers' learning processes were similar. They gave a lot of importance to deconstructing their own identities; recognizing their own hybridity was identified as an important step in understanding themselves and the complex identities of others. Furthermore, the increased awareness of interculturality led teachers to develop more empathetic relationships with students and more reflective educational practices. Given the positive outcomes of participation in the MOOC, the authors make a claim for the importance of including topics related to interculturality across teacher training programmes and highlight the value of action research approaches for developing *in situ* educational practices.

This strand of teacher education is developed further in Section 3. In her meaningful introduction, Sharkey articulates the importance of the foregoing discussions for teacher education and stresses the need to see teacher education as an important site of decolonial praxis that sits within a broader project of promoting

linguistic justice. Sharkey vindicates the importance of “local and national knowledge, wisdom and practice” supporting her own claims in reference to the transformative work of Colombian scholar Fals Borda.

In Chapter 12, Hernández Gaviria and Berdugo-Torres provide a review of local studies and of teacher education curricula in relation to multilingualism. Whilst highlighting the prevalence of socio-culturally sensitive approaches that see teaching as a transformative act responsive and responding to students’ needs, they identify that explicit reference to multilingualism is all but absent. By looking to international tendencies that embrace the so-called ‘multilingual turn’, they make a case for more explicit inclusion of multilingualism in Colombian language teacher education and argue that whilst such a project is a big undertaking, it is coherent with the socioculturally sensitive approaches that dominate teacher education in the country.

One such undertaking to decentre English and promote multilingualism is detailed by Guerrero-Nieto and Quintero Polo in Chapter 13. The authors take the example of an MA course designed for in-service teachers and investigate, via narrative inquiry, how in-service teachers problematize and resist the dominance of English in multilingual contexts. Within a framework of critical, decolonial scholarship, students’ idea of English shifted away from something instrumental to something related to power imbalances and socioeconomic conditions. The study found that students also became able to recognise their own agency in contesting the dominant discourses around English and could reconceptualise it as a tool of empowerment and showed an increased understanding of their role as social actors.

Chapter 14 documents research undertaken within the framework of an ongoing collaborative project between university teacher–researchers, in-service and pre-service teachers in Bogotá. In this chapter, Clavijo-Olarte and Austin go to great lengths to outline the collaborative nature of the ethnography that was carried out to research the linguistic landscapes of two multilingual and multicultural downtown neighbourhoods of Colombia’s capital. In highlighting the importance of collaboration in this process, the authors draw attention to the affordances of communal work in fostering diversity and the emergence of new identities. Shuttling between theoretical and empirical sections in a way that mirrors the research undertaken, Clavijo-Olarte and Austin claim that an analysis of the linguistic landscapes of these neighbourhoods allowed students to not only develop an appreciation of multimodal literacy practices as resources for learning, but also to pay attention to the specificities, and grounded understandings, of place in responding to students’ needs.

The final chapter in this section takes a step back and reviews the literature related to writing practices in bilingual (Spanish/English) teaching in Colombia. Loaiza and Ortiz Ruiz organise their review along three axes. Firstly, in relation to theory, they find a number of different theories related to writing spanning psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic and sociocultural approaches. Secondly, they reflect

that, methodologically, most studies have been carried out within a qualitative paradigm and they note the prevalence of action research approaches, reflecting local traditions. Importantly for the volume, the majority of studies examine L2 writing mostly independent of L1. Finally, in relation to practice, the authors claim that the studies reviewed provide an evidence base for both process and product approaches to teaching writing. Loaiza and Ruiz relate their findings to the intentions of the volume through recommendations based on their survey of the literature including that L1 be used to support L2 development, that linguistic, discursive and social aspects of writing be taken into account and that teaching writing can be an opportunity to promote minorized languages and cultures.

The volume concludes with an afterword in which Hornberger dexterously weaves together the many threads that have emerged throughout the various chapters, consolidating and distilling the volume's themes of multilingualism and education, within which she highlights the important role of social justice and the decolonial imperative. In keeping with the principles of reflexivity, Hornberger draws on her own trajectory and positionality to reflect on the resonances between the volume's chapters and her Continua of Biliteracy (CoBi) framework (Hornberger 2003). This assertion is not only related to the overlapping concerns with the implementation of bi-/multilingualism in both policy and practice, but also serves to elevate the debates and discussions contained in this volume and recognise their significance beyond the Colombian context.

This volume is indeed significant, not least in its coherence of form and function. The inclusion of languages other than English on the page as a praxis of visibilizing multilingualism is evident throughout, so too is the inclusion of a plurality of voices (perhaps most compellingly in Chapter 6). The recognition of Colombian scholarship and trajectories of knowledge are also noticeable throughout the volume which, when brought into symphony with scholars working in different latitudes (as in each section introduction), give an example of how to sit astride the local-global divide, how to engage with global scholarship without sacrificing the richness of the place-based specificity of the work presented in the volume.

In bringing together previously diverse research traditions and consolidating a platform from which to discuss multilingualism and language education in a broad sense, this volume makes an important contribution both locally and globally. Locally, the volume makes an important case for the reimagination of many language teaching practices, especially to scholars working in the area of English language teaching and teacher education, and has the potential to underpin innovative context-sensitive, multilingual and intercultural approaches to (E)LT. Globally, by bringing these discussions together, and through the strategic engagement with academics working in diverse latitudes, the volume offers Colombian scholars the chance to be read, understood, and the contribution they can make to

the disciplines of applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, intercultural communication and education appreciated. In the dialogue around language education and multilingualism, the volume should be read as a much overdue long-turn from Colombian scholars, and we would all do well to listen to what they have to tell us.

References

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