

Ideology, practice and political economy in the study of “bilingualism”

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We analyze two case studies from our own research and trajectory as scholars from Southern contexts, which show that bilingualism is a troubled category and that we always study “bilingualism” -as a discursive regime between quotes- and not bilingualism per se. Specifically, the cases reveal that the signifiers of “bilingualism” and “bilingual” can become hegemonic (and disempowering) from the logic of the power dynamics within the two contexts. In the case of Perú, the use of the signifier renders invisible the racialization processes that exclude a sector of the population from their access to symbolic and material resources. In the case of the Philippines, it erases a complex multilingual reality which has then resulted in the marginalization of Philippine languages and speakers in policy-making, education and community development. This discussion is in line with Heller’s call for integrating practice, ideology and political economy in the study of bilingualism.

Keywords: bilingualism, political economy, Perú, Philippines, racialization, ideology, practice

Introduction

The notion of bi/multilingualism is somewhat a troubled/problematic one, in the sense that it is always inscribed in the battles for meaning with material consequences. The rethinking of “language/s” as the object/s of study, inquiries on coloniality/decoloniality and southern epistemologies, an emphasis on issues of political economy and social justice, and developments on new materialism and post humanism have contributed to key epistemological and ontological challenges for the field of bilingualism/multilingualism in the last decades (McKinney, Makoe & Zavala 2024).

In what follows, we will refer to two case studies from our own research and trajectory as scholars from Southern contexts: Perú and the Philippines. We think that both cases clearly show that bilingualism is a troubled category: that we always study “bilingualism” -as a discursive regime between quotes- and not bilingualism per se, as Heller has reminded us (Heller 2007). Specifically, the cases show that the signifiers of “bilingualism” and “bilingual” can become hegemonic (and disempowering) from the logic of the power dynamics within the two contexts. To become hegemonic, ideological processes of erasure take place, which are always key in ideological work. In the case of Perú, the use of the signifier renders invisible the racialization processes that exclude a sector of the population from their access to symbolic and material resources. In the case of the Philippines, it erases a complex multilingual reality

which has then resulted in the marginalization of Philippine languages and speakers in policy-making, education and community development. This, in turn, generates reactions from different types of social actors who develop other ways of constructing bilingualism. Nevertheless, this produces new tensions in the societies involved with agency and structure playing simultaneously.

“Bilingualism”, “bilingual” and “bilingual education” not only reveal shifting indexicalities over time, but also in a particular historical moment where meanings are disputed among social actors at various scales and within specific political economies. Both of us, as also social actors in the studied scenarios, have somewhat been complicit in constructing bilingualism from a perspective of modernist nationalism and have struggled to adopt a critical stance, which seeks to address the complexities of how power works in language processes, and places social difference and social inequality at the center of its concerns (Heller 2011).

Bilingualisms, coloniality and race in Perú

During the years of working from and about Perú, I (Virginia) started to realize that the signifier of bilingualism was used differently (or not used at all) according to which social actors display it, in which context and for what purposes. Hence, bilingualism becomes ideologized, debated and contested in sociocultural fields that are often fragmented and divided, rather than homogeneous, static, consensual and clearly bounded (Blommaert 1999, Jaffe 1999, Woolard 1998, Heller 2007, among others). Moreover, the meanings of bilingualism and bilingual practices hold a different indexical force depending on the social domain of those who produce those practices but also those who recognize them. These representations of bilingualism within diverse hegemonies occur across events at various scales, which shows that the macro level of analysis is not a homogeneous structure. In Perú, the notion of bilingualism -and the way its value is controlled- is organized differently across institutions and groups within scattered hegemonies connected to material conditions in diverse locations. Nevertheless, these hegemonies are still somewhat linked. I will share some examples here.

Historically, Peruvian academia has contemplated the promotion of bilingualism and multilingualism as emancipatory and as a good in itself, as has been the trend in the field (Duchêne 2020). This view is much aligned with Peruvian official language policies that resort to the recognition of cultural and linguistic resources, but at the same time depoliticizes indigenous identity and the struggle for their rights and access to symbolic and material resources. This celebratory and depoliticized approach to multilingualism has developed as part of current neoliberal multicultural policies in the globalized world (Hale 2005, Brown

2015). Although the official State discourse celebrates multilingualism as if it constituted a de facto advantage for all and for all alike (“Peru is a multilingual and plurilingual country”, read the slogans in different official sites), a racial/colonial rhetoric is always there, which makes it a racialized multiculturalism/multilingualism based on a colonial agenda (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010). Differently from the Philippines, especially during the early ‘postcolonial’ decades (see below), the official discourse in Perú makes multilingualism (and not only bilingualism) visible and contemplates Mother-tongue bilingual education in many of the 40 indigenous languages (despite the dominance of Quechua)¹.

With independence from Spain 200 years ago, indigenous languages did not receive official status, were not included in the nation-building project, and their speakers were placed on the margins of civic life within a deeply racist society. It was not until the 1970’s when bilingual education emerged as part of social movements that fought for agrarian reform and the economic empowerment of Peruvian peasants. Nevertheless, since the 1990’s and the fierce neoliberalization of Perú’s economic and educational system this type of education has survived within a neoliberal, multicultural and celebratory discourse with no attempts for social transformation. Despite several more critical grassroots initiatives, Mother tongue-based bilingual education only implemented in rural areas encodes colonized images of the indigenous population and ends up reproducing racialized boundaries that follow the colonial structure of Peruvian society. In fact, this official view of bilingual education divorces this type of education from broader political struggles and reframes it as a compensatory program for linguistically deficient students. Although I am not developing this further due to space, I am pointing it out because it intersects with one of the cases that I will explain below.

I will now show how social actors from hegemonies at different scales construct bilingualism differently, and mostly in a disempowering way, as has been discussed in other contexts as well (see Woolard 2020 for the Catalan case where bilingualism is rejected because people think that it would inevitably lead to language shift towards Spanish). The two cases that I will refer to reveal how people within the Quechua-speaking population itself construct bilingualism according to their interests and for specific purposes when they are in a position of power, in a context where social mobility has generated more complex dynamics in relation to how groups are delimited. The cases reveal how the way the meaning of bilingualism is constructed in the Peruvian context relates to difference, boundaries and inequality, as Heller has amply discussed in her research.

¹ The difficulties with which this type of education is implemented is another story.

Similarly to other studies that have also found the trope of bilingual as problematic (as when it is used in connection to migrant children), the sign “bilingual” is sometimes used to refer to racialized Quechua speakers from high altitude rural communities deprived of abilities in Spanish, similarly to what happens to the term “Quechua hablante” (Kvietok 2019). It replaces the sign “Indian”, in a somewhat euphemistic way, without running the risk of being labeled as a discriminator, in a context where “Indian” has been historically constructed as an insult. Hence, the signifier of “bilingual” has acquired an ideological meaning that erases racialization processes. The following excerpts come from a discussion among teachers from a University in the Andes, the majority of whom were socialized within Quechua families in a context where more than 70% declare speaking Quechua at home (Zavala 2011). These teachers are talking about the students from an affirmative action program that brings support to a new (and more ruralized) Quechua population accessing higher education. The difference between the teachers and the students is that the former ones have been settled in the city longer, are more disconnected from a peasant and rural life and have acquired cultural capital:

Teacher #1: At the beginning the program intended to help students who spoke vernacular languages. The students of the university in a large majority are, shall we say, BILINGUALS, they have multiple problems: social, economic, psychological. In the universities, these BILINGUAL students have social incorporation problems, they have academic problems. From that, this program has been created with the goal of helping them so they can get better.

Teacher #2: Therefore, the students who enter the university from Series 100, all, more than others, of the students that are BILINGUAL and come from poorer areas have greater problems than those who are city dwellers and come from private high schools, but all have problems. They have reading problems, writing problems. You can note these characteristics: BILINGUALS, their isolation, their marginality, their lack of communication, and when you give a survey to see what they’ve understood, just the literal understanding, nothing else, there they have serious problems. The students from this program are precisely those persons who come from rural areas, from low economic conditions, and are BILINGUALS, thus, because of that they have education problems, they lack, well, the tools, reading strategies, writing strategies (emphasis added and translation from Spanish).

What I want to point out here is that the meaning of “bilingual” from a deficit discourse is attached to the social practice and the political economy that is in play in this particular context. Teachers of this university, descendants of Quechua families themselves, reproduce the racialized and classed structure of Peruvian society by excluding newcomers whom they try to differentiate with in order to maintain their privilege. As I mentioned before, the signifier “bilingual” is articulated with a deficit perspective, evokes traits of “indianidad” (and of inferiority) and gets inserted in a hierarchical dichotomy of “bilingual”-“non bilingual” that always ends up functioning ideologically. From the position of a now whitened middle class in

this specific context, and through the repeated use of the term “bilingual” within a racial rhetoric, teachers reproduce a representation of the university as a place where these students do not belong. This shows that the structure of social domination is fractally recursive, despite the implementation of an affirmative action program that is supposed to include and not exclude.

The racialized identity of the bilingual that is depicted here shows how race is part of the continued rearticulation of colonial distinctions in postcolonial relations (see also Reyes 2017). The term “bilingual” replaces classical racial categories in a context where postcolonial subjects try to copy practices associated with colonizers, such as attending university. Nevertheless, these divisions are often constructed by people whose skin color is not different from the ones they racialize. In Rosa and Flores’ words: “Whiteness functions as a structural position that can be inhabited by whites and nonwhites alike depending on the circumstances” (2017: 629). This racialized view of bilinguals gets reproduced here in a clear way, although it is also more implicitly present in the celebratory (and depoliticized) neoliberal multicultural policies from the Peruvian official discourse. A Quechua activist once told me (Virginia) the following as a way of reacting to the above discourse: “You are bilingual in a community according to the State because you need to become Spanish-speaking out of necessity, but this doesn’t make you visible (...) This doesn’t make you want to become bilingual”.

Besides this context of higher education, we find another more complex case where subjects, also within the Quechua-speaking population, construct a meaning for bilingualism from a position of power. During the 1970’s, language policies for minoritized populations were dominated by top-down policies coming from the capital city of Lima, where the Quechua-speaking population was the invisible interest group (Hornberger 1995). However, in the 1980’s and 90’s Quechua speaking people started to access higher education and many were trained as linguists and bilingual education experts in different kinds of programs. Currently, we can find a big group of people who are employed as Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) specialists in the local office of the Ministry of Education, teach Quechua in universities or work in NGOs involved in educational issues, within a context where rights discourses are still strong but Quechua emerges as an economic resource granting access to jobs and material capital (Del Percio et al. 2017). Hence, these Quechua people now hold economic and symbolic power. They represent an educated urban Quechua middle class similar to the university teachers from the former case but integrating a different community of practice.

These Quechua “experts”, as I have referred to them before (Zavala 2020a), construct themselves as the authorizing agents in the valuation of Quechua language practices and speakers based on discursive fields dominated by essentializing ideologies of language and identity (Jaffe 2007). This way, they display a distinction between themselves and other speakers of Quechua who are positioned as not mastering their language and are hence delegitimized (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). From this position, the signifier of bilingualism is somewhat erased, since what is emphasized is the proficiency in two bounded languages but, more specifically, the mastery of the indigenous language. For that matter, the legitimized Quechua speaker is represented as the one who masters a standardized Quechua that is not influenced by Spanish (hence not “quechuañol”), displays a metalinguistic awareness about it and incarnates a Quechua identity linked to an ancestral culture.

For instance, despite the use of the official term “Intercultural Bilingual Education”, this has ended up being understood as the learning of indigenous languages AND Spanish as autonomous languages, and not as the dynamic and fluid development of bilingual practices where resources associated with both languages always interact. In fact, a review of some policy documents and practices in different contexts (also influenced by the work of these experts) shows that the subjectivity of the indigenous language speaker AND Spanish is reified and valued, and not that of the bilingual speaker. A series of practices also reveals the above: experts from the Ministry of Education evaluate classroom teachers’ Quechua proficiency from an ideal named language and evaluate with lower scores those who present “Spanish loan words” (Zavala 2020b); or training programs in IBE do not have any bilingualism courses in their curricula and teachers transmit to their students that they speak a pejorative “quechuañol” and a de-legitimized Quechua. Once, I (Virginia) talked to a whole group of students being trained in this type of program and they told me that the only ones who would not speak “quechuañol” were their teachers from the program and the old people from peasant communities who were more than 95 years of age. The circulation of “quechuañol” influences the fact that the “bilingual” identity does not empower and a course on bilingualism would not make much sense.

This way of erasing the signifier of bilingualism and portraying a clear cut distinction between Quechua and Spanish as autonomous languages reveals sociopolitical struggles and a strategic essentialism against the hegemony of Spanish and the way Quechua speakers have been historically oppressed. This also reacts to the representation of bilingualism as a racialized trope discussed above. Something similar has been found in Argentina, where indigenous people also demand recognition by delimiting the indigenous language as a well defined

language different from Spanish (Bonnin & Unamuno 2020). Nevertheless, while in certain Peruvian social domains “bilingual” does not index a legitimate identity, in Argentina people have appropriated the category of “bilingual” and self identify as such by understanding it as speaking Spanish and the indigenous language as full fledged and legitimate languages different from each other. However, despite the fact that these experts in Perú try to counteract the lived historical oppression and reclaim the minoritized language by erasing the category of bilingualism, at the same time they fail to challenge dominant modernist discourses related to language, which end up excluding and disempowering an important sector of bilinguals, in particular that of the youth (Zavala 2020a).

These battles for meanings around the Quechua language, Quechuaness and bilingualism do not only reflect an economy of ideas, but also symbolic and material privilege, which are linked to jobs, salaries, opportunities to teach the language, access to publish in it, among other resources. The link between language and political economy enables us to explain processes of social differentiation and inequality, in a context where some people can effectively convert or exchange their linguistic resources for other forms of capital, while others do not. In this second case under study, certain Quechua forms and verbal practices conceptualized as “pure” Quechua index class positions that are connected to the ownership and control over the means of production. The knowledge of literacy, grammar and standardized Quechua (as distant from Spanish) has acquired value, can be exchanged for material goods and benefits a specific group of Quechua speakers at the expense of others.

What we have discussed above shows that bilingualism conflates many linguistic arrangements that are always inscribed in social meanings. These social meanings are crossed by issues of difference, boundaries and inequality, which (as Heller has strongly emphasized) always situates the study of bilingualism in the realm of the political. In addition, the ideas that people have in relation to bilingualism tells us about ideologies of language and society. For instance, in the case of Perú, they not only reveal the link among language, race and coloniality in more official discourses, but also dynamics within the Quechua population itself in a context of an upwardly mobile Quechua middle class and the commodification of the indigenous language. In the cases I discussed, bilingualism is not empowering per se. In the first case, it clearly does not empower, while in the second one it both empowers (as people access resources by becoming specialists in IBE) and disempowers simultaneously (as the sign indexes a sanctioned “quechuañol”). Finally, the meanings of bilingualism from the positioning of diverse social actors are somewhat linked within multiple hegemonies at various scales.

As researchers, we are always part of these battles for the meanings of bilingualism. I (Virginia) was trained in Perú as an undergraduate from an acritical view of bilingualism framed within the discursive regime of the nation-state, which naturalized the equation among language, culture, identity, and territory. It is very common for researchers in Peru to be part of public debates and the 1980-90's was a time when many linguists participated in the decision making process regarding intercultural bilingual education for minoritized populations. Although scholars thought they were studying bilingualism objectively, they were really studying "bilingualism", in the sense of a specific way of understanding the notion from a particular discursive regime (see Heller 2007). That framework, that haunted the field for decades, was very strong and constituted a lens that did not let us approach the phenomenon from a more critical, practice-oriented, emic and political perspective that Monica's research and critical sociolinguistics have been developing in the last decades. Although scholars were determined that they were doing political work from academia, the political question was not really there: "in whose interest it is to construct language(s) and their relationships in certain ways?" (Heller 2007: 341). We were not capable of reflecting about our own position and interest, and about how we were reproducing dominant power relationships while seeking not to. As a white woman in a country like Perú, this matter has always been an issue for me. In my research about language and education in Perú the work of Monica Heller has been very important in approaching bi/multilingualism from a critical and ethnographic perspective that combines practice, ideology and political economy (Heller 2007, 2011).

"Bilingualism", coloniality and the erasure of multilingualism in the Philippines

In many countries, as in the case of Peru as described in the earlier section, which continuously struggle with establishing their own identities and reclaim power over charting their own destinies without colonial and/or foreign interference, the problem of language and how to account for it has shaped the way speakers view themselves as language users (Heugh 2009). This is the reason why, indeed, as scholars it is important to use "bilingual" critically and cautiously in our work. The world through the scholarly lens of bilingualism and bilingual education is a constructed hegemonic world where speakers are supposed to be viewed in terms of their competence in two languages – usually the colonial or dominant foreign language and a locally-produced national language. This is also the case, for example, in Malaysia where English and Malay define what it means to be bilingual in a multilingual country (Mosiur et al. 2021), or in Singapore, where English and one of the three state-imposed mother tongues -- (Mandarin) Chinese, Malay or Tamil – is the dominant configuration of language competence

despite the presence of many other languages (Pakir 1991, Tupas 2011). The same can be said with Nepal (Taylor 2010), Brunei (Haji-Othman 2016), Pakistan (Tamim 2014) and many other countries where multilingualism is the norm but bilingual competence in two dominant languages is what shapes people's appraisal of their own linguistic environments. This process leads to the erasure or muting of indigenous and other racialized groups excluded from the dominant bilingual frame (Haque 2005).

In other words, the bilingual lens has served as an ideological tool of erasure of linguistic diversity as appraised by the speakers themselves. Similar to Peru, "bilingual", "bilingualism" and "bilingual education" in the Philippines function as ideological and political constructs which have no objective referents. Rather, they have been mobilized as part of larger hegemonic and/or resistive social projects of nation-building, decolonization, and social justice, intersecting – variably within particular historical junctures – with neoliberal globalization, and local social and ethnolinguistic relations. They have been deployed as part of decolonizing efforts in education and society in general, but they have also been used to privilege particular language practices and experiences while devaluing and marginalizing others. Of course, a "multilingual" lens has its own problems too as it also frames our view(s) of how languages are used (Pennycook 2010) and valued (Duchêne 2020). However, what I (Ruanni) hope to demonstrate here is the fact that "bilingual" and related terms are choices made over other options such as "multilingual" under historical, political and cultural conditions, thus a nuanced take on them is necessary to properly locate their specific uses and meanings within particular historical configurations of nation-building, globalization and local social relations.

Scholars of bilingualism are acutely aware of the limits of these related terms, reminding us that they "have many different meanings depending on the context they are used in" (Grosjean 2013: 5), but they use them anyway purportedly as reference to the use or recognition of "two or more languages" (5). Thus, the fact that "bilingual" is used when the alternative "multilingual" is also a free option is very telling of the normative practices we as scholars engage in with our use of terms and concepts. Pavlenko (2006) acknowledges that the term "bilingualism" typically refers to the study of bi- and multilingualism as it is in line with "the traditions of the field of bilingualism" (2). However, even if she carefully differentiates between the terms "bilingual" (use of two languages) and "multilingual" (use of more than two languages), she admits that research focuses primarily on bilinguals, "their bilingual selves" and their experiences (2; also Fuller 2015; Carroll and Combs 2016; Viado 2007).

A specific configuration of the politics and ideology of the bilingual can be seen through my own struggle with the term as a Filipino scholar which, in turn, can best be explained by contextualizing such a struggle within a deeply historicized and contextualized understanding of power-laden hegemonic language policy-making. The “bilingual” option emerged as a decolonial option for language-in-education in the Philippines but, in the process, it became a hegemonic lens through which the erasure of multilingual realities and experiences of many Filipinos was mobilized. Since 1974 during which bilingual education in English and Pilipino (renamed as “Filipino” in the 1987 constitution as the national language of the Philippines) was institutionalized as a decolonial approach to education, the bilingual perspective (the need for English and the national language for globalization and nationalism respectively) has been the dominant lens both in scholarly work and in popular discourses (Tupas 2015b; Gonzalez 1980).

The specific configuration of “bilingual” could be traced back to the Philippine-American War of 1899-1902. Prior to this war, the Philippines was ruled by Spain for 333 years which by and large did not see education in Spanish as crucial in its colonizing project. When the Americans forcibly annexed the Philippines, however, the establishment of schools where reading and English would be taught became the top priority of the war department (Rafael 2015). Where there was temporary or relative peace, American soldiers were instructed to begin what would later be referred to as the colonial project of *benevolent assimilation* (Miller 1984). From this bloody war of 1899-1902 until early 1970s, English essentially remained as the sole medium of instruction even if there were periods of discontent (Tagalog was named as the national language in 1937 at the time Filipinos were agitating for independence) and experimentation (vernacular education was introduced in several primary schools in the 1950s and 1960s) (Gonzalez 1980). Thus, even after the Philippines gained its nominal independence from the United States in 1946, the country was still under neocolonial conditions because its economic, cultural and educational systems were still structurally and ideologically aligned with American colonial rule (Lichauco 1973).

However, the dominant status of English in the education system was seriously threatened during the debates on the writing of a new constitution which was promulgated eventually in 1973. Deep-rooted ethnolinguistic rivalries between speakers of different Philippine languages, as well as strong anti-colonial sentiments complicated the language politics of the country (Gonzalez 1980). On the one hand, non-Tagalog (Pilipino) speakers resisted Tagalog (Pilipino) as the country’s national language, thus the new constitution became silent on the national language issue. On the other hand, anti-colonial politics was at its peak, with street protests since the 1960s calling for the nationalization of all aspects of

Philippine life including its economy and educational system. Thus, while Pilipino ceased to become the country's national language, it became a symbol of Filipinos' call for genuine self-determination (Constantino 1970, Gonzalez 1980, Garcia 2017). Thus, for the first time, a political compromise was introduced in the form of bilingual education which was institutionalized in 1974 by an order from the Ministry of Education. Essentially bilingual education would be the use of English (as the language of modernization) in the teaching of mathematics and science, and the use of Pilipino (as the language of nationalism) in all other subjects in the educational system.

This was the political context from which "bilingual" emerged. In a sense, it served as a decolonial tool to destabilize the supposedly undisputed status of English in Philippine education and society. What "provoked," according to Garcia (2017), the bilingual educational policy was the "decolonizing imperative" (25). The more pervasive use of Pilipino was to serve as a means to forge a national identity among Filipinos of all ethnolinguistic backgrounds, certainly far from being a hegemonic term which has characterized its use years later. Bilingualism and bilingual education at the time meant Filipinos' attempt for self-assertion after decades of unequal relationship with the colonial rulers, formally and informally. It served a political purpose at a particular juncture of the country's "unfinishable" nation-building project (Hau 2005).

The problem with "bilingual", however, was that after its institutionalization in 1974, it began to circulate without recalibrating its indexicalities in relation to multicultural and multilingual realities. There was strategic suppression of diversity and multivocality with the aim to break down the sole dominance of the English language and the educational infrastructures which accompanied such dominance (for example, mobilizing the language as the sole medium of instruction). In order to disrupt its dominance, Pilipino had to take on an anti-colonial indexicality, foremost of which was its association with nationalism, thus English for internationalization and modernization, and Pilipino for nationalism and national unity (Gonzalez 1980, Garcia 2017). Filipino scholars and state institutions, however, drew upon these indexicalities in pushing the "bilingual" agenda (Pascasio 1975, 1977, Bautista and Go 1999), even if it was now to be operationalized in practice within real communities with real struggles against all forms of marginalization. What was meant as an emancipatory project ended up being a tool of cultural erasure and educational discrimination as the narratives and experiences of multilingualism and multiculturalism have been largely ignored in the nation-building project. Literature written in the local languages could not be considered part of "national" literature unless they were translated into the national language, Pilipino, now

Filipino (Lumbera 2000). Philippine languages struggled for recognition in educational spaces, acting at best as languages of transition into both English and Pilipino in the higher grades (Walter and Dekker 2011).

In recent years, Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), which legally mandates the use of the mother tongue from Kindergarten to Primary 3 classrooms in the Philippines, has seriously destabilized the bilingual agenda (Tupas 2015). However, since its promulgation in 2013, it has continued to struggle for acceptance because dominant views of Philippine languages are that they are mere “dialects” with very little use in national and international spaces. At the time this chapter is being written, the lower house of Philippine Congress has endorsed the suspension of MTB-MLE in favor of the return to a bilingual system of education (*House suspends* 2023). The call for suspension is highly likely to prosper given the climate of suspicion against and, in fact, colonially-induced hatred towards the mother tongues (Tupas 2015a). Even if it does not prosper for some stroke of political genius, this high level move to delegitimize multilingualism is evidence of how the “bilingual” should always be viewed as an arbitrary lens through which historically constructed conflicted and contradictory aspirations of people are mobilized, some emancipatory, some oppressive.

I was once invited to contribute a chapter to an edited volume, *The Filipino Bilingual: A Multidisciplinary Perspective* (Bautista and Tan 1999), which was then touted as a definitive book featuring the work of Filipino language scholars at the time. This was a festschrift in honor of Emy M. Pascasio, one of the country’s pioneering sociolinguists who, in fact, was credited to have edited the first book on the same topic -- *The Filipino Bilingual: Studies on Philippine Bilingualism and Bilingual Education* (Pascasio 1977). Bourdieu’s symbolic violence (2001) would be an apt framework to understanding the power of the bilingual lens not only to determine the direction of (bilingual) language research in the country, but also in imposing and privileging a particular kind of bilingualism or bilingual competence in the research – one focused narrowly on Filipinos’ use of English and Pilipino/Filipino. This has had a massive and disastrous impact on language research in the country since it has marginalized the study of Filipinos outside of Metro Manila and neighbouring provinces where, aside from English and Pilipino, other Philippine languages are also simultaneously being used. Berowa and Regala-Flores (2020) have recently called for an “inclusive description” of language practices and structures of Filipinos (located in other parts of the country) whose language repertoires fall outside the “bilingual” English-Pilipino framework of scholarly studies for the past four decades at least. In both the 1977 and 1999 editions of *The Filipino bilingual* book, scholars locate their work within the country’s linguistically diverse landscape,

yet the object of study is consistent across all chapters in both volumes – the Filipino speaker’s competence in the use of English and Pilipino even if the speaker may have had a wider linguistic and communicative (multilingual) repertoire. Thus, even if one expands one’s definition of the bilingual to include the ability or use of more than two languages, the use of one lens over another directs particular research agenda which is focused on the language experiences of particular groups of people while excluding the experiences of others. As happened with Virginia in Perú, I also became complicit in reproducing dominant ideologies and practices of “bilingualism”, framing my own work along the lines of the hegemonic Filipino bilingual, erasing even my own everyday multilingual repertoire, which can be described as the simultaneous use of two Philippine languages – Aklanon and Hiligaynon – alongside the national language and English.

This is one example of how the use of “bilingual” has become a hegemonic practice which has served as an ideological blinker in research, identity formation and everyday understanding of language politics. However, we should also extend many scholars’ reminder that the term varies from one context to another by locating it diachronically within broad sociocultural contexts. In other words, its hegemonic nature must also be understood within particular formations of language politics as it circulates across time. In the case of the “bilingual” in the Philippines, it has taken on a hegemonic role in nation-building at particular junctures of Philippine history, but not after having served as a decolonial option as well, thus unraveling its complicated ideologically charged history (Tupas 2015b).

Final thoughts

This chapter essentially argues that “bilingual” and its related terms are political and ideological constructs whose meanings and practices have evolved through historically specific social transformations. How they have been mobilized, however, should be understood within particular configurations of politics, culture and social relations. Thus, in the case of Peru, we believe that “bilingualism” (and “bilingual”) can have disempowering effects because of the way in which it has been racialized and inscribed in a deficit perspective of the speaker. For this reason, in the process of vindication of indigenous languages by indigenous speakers themselves, this signifier is not usually made visible. In the case of the Philippines, “bilingual” has led to the erasure of multilingual realities, even if the term has earlier been deployed as a decolonizing lens through which an anti-colonial nation-building project was waged. In both cases we see how “bilingual” has taken on hegemonic and transformative meanings and functions.

Following Heller's call for integrating practice, ideology and political economy in the study of bilingualism, we suggest that our research asks how models of bilingualism emerge through different types of processes; how such models are linked to particular social, cultural, political and economic interests or ideologies; what tensions in specific societies they reveal; and what the consequences are for how different kinds of speakers are positioned. In addition, we believe that it is key to question a priori presumptions about the relationship between bilingualism and power (Rosa & Burdick 2017), since the relationship between language practices and power depends on the language ideologies through which the meaning of communicative practices is interpreted in situated contexts. Working contextually within ethnographic perspectives is what will allow us to avoid overarching statements about bilingualism and multilingualism. Our two cases show precisely how bilingualism is constructed differently in relation to the sociocultural dynamics at play in the two contexts.

Thus, as scholars of bi/multilingualism, it is important not only to raise awareness of the ideological and political nature of "bilingual" but, especially, to unpack our uses of the term in our own work as this has implications for the way we give voice to – or silence – particular communities of speakers just by our mobilization of the term and the specific ideological lens it deploys. This is one of Heller's fundamental arguments about research on bilingualism – that we are, in fact, conducting research on "bilingual" speakers, "bilingualism", and "bilingual education", where the speakers and the conditions within which they operate have become "bilingual" through our research or through how we are positioned socially, culturally and politically within our own communities. Heller has argued "for a sociolinguistics that is not a form of expert knowledge, but rather an informed and situated social practice, one which can account for what we see, but which also knows why we see what we do, and what it means to tell the story" (2011: 6). The space of bi/multilingualism is a permanent site of discursive struggle; and one which challenges us as sociolinguists who are always reflecting about the status of the knowledge we produce, our positionings within complicated relations of power and the roles we could or should play in society (Heller, 2011, 2012).

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