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Bilingualism and bilingual education in a complex context

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This article is based on results from a baseline study for an intended intervention project in bilingual-intercultural education in the Municipality of San Miguel Ixtahuacan, in the Department of San Marcos, Guatemala. To a great extent the article deals with issues of bilingual education from the perspective of social justice. It analyses further various components underpinning the attempts to develop a comprehensive bilingual and intercultural education in this specific context. The article is exploratory in character as it intends to develop lines of analysis useful in discussing challenges faced by bilingualism and multilingualism in contexts where factors involve are complex and of vary different nature. Central to the analysis is the assumption that historical factors and social justice have a key role in bilingual, and intercultural education.

Key words: bilingualism, bilingual education, intercultural education, socio-economic factors

1 Introduction

This article is largely grounded in a study intended to establish a baseline for an intervention in bilingual intercultural education in the Municipality of San Miguel Ixtahuacan, in the Departmentof San Marcos, Guatemala (c.f., Moreno Herrera, Åström & Crisostomo, 2007).A background for the study is the work that the Swedish NGO, *Individuell människohjälp (IM),* has carried out in Guatemala and El Salvador since year 2000. In the first country much attention has been given to supporting social and economical development in the municipality of San Miguel Ixtahuacan. A central question faced by IM was: Would it be best to offer continuous support for infrastructures and children enrolment in school or would it be better to study the ground problem and make a contribution that would hopefully have a more long

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lasting impact? Different local actors, e.g., parents' organizations, community leaders and teachers have approached IM in search of support for schools and the improvement of the quality of the education in this municipality. IM concluded that there is an urgent need to focus on the educational sector as a guaranty for the cultural, economical and democratic development of the area. In consequence IM decided to carry out a development assistance project including bilingual education at primary school level. One of the authors of this article (Lázaro Moreno Herrera) acted as academic advisor of the project and led the baseline study.

In this chapter the case of bilingual education in San Miguel Ixtahuacan will be discussed in relation to similar efforts in other poor settings, mainly in South America.

2 Bilingual education and attitudes

The importance of taking account of social dimensions of teaching and learning in the research of bilingual classrooms was argued already in the seventies by Fishman (1977). The use of the notion of *language as a resource* (Ruiz 1984) instead of language as a problem or language as a right, is nowadays more or less taken for granted in research on bilingual education. Hornberger (2005) who has carried out extended research on bilingual education in South America shows the importance of planning policies for language in education that seek to develop diverse languages as resources for students. However Ruiz (1997) has warned that language planning including the use of languages of historically marginalized and oppressed groups may indeed "coincide with the exclusion of their voices" (p 320). Also Valdéz (1983) has reported on bilingual education that in fact resulted in the exclusion of minority students' voices.

Bilingual education has been implemented in many different settings all over the world. In most cases in former colonies, such as Guatemala, the colonial states left a school system that was directed towards monolingualism, which means for example that the language of the former colony was the only language used in education. That language had at

the same time been given the status of national and official language and proficiency in that language was the gatekeeper to economic, social and politic status. After independence post-colonial élites, "ladinos" in the case of Guatemala, continue to prolong the monolingual norm. The examples of how colonizers neglected linguistic realities abound and today many multilingual states hold stronger monolingual norms than many of the former colonizers, both explicitly through laws and educational policies and implicitly through neglect or negative attitudes towards languages that are not connected to status of power. The impact of these policies is seen all over the world today, particularly in former colonies where a large parts of the population, in many cases the far majority, do not speak the official language. The impact is particularly visible in education where many pupils are taught through a language that they do not master from primary school, in many cases a language that not even the teachers master (Hornberger & Chick 2000, King 1999).

Research on education in bi- or multilingual settings is quite impressive today and has been carried out by among others Cummins (2000), Heller & Martin-Jones (2001), Hornberger & Chick (2001), and Hornberger & King 1998). A study by Tomas and Collier (1997, 2002) showed very impressively that the most important factor for children's success in education, is that their mother tongue is strongly supported throughout their schooling (see also Cummins, 1996, 2000, Baker 2006, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). Tomas and Collier showed that the use of children's mother tongue through the first four years of schooling is crucial for the outcome of their schooling. That children are taught in a language they understand is particularly important during the first years of schooling, when they are supposed to learn the three R's (reading, writing and arithmetic).

Baker (2006) classifies educational programs in bilingual settings based on the language of instruction, pupil enrolment, and the socio-cultural and linguistic goals. The first level of classification is between monolingual programs and bilingual programs. In

monolingual programs only one language is used and the goal is assimilation, commonly that pupils with non-majority linguistic background develop proficiency in the majority language. Baker classifies bilingual programs as transmission, maintenance and two-way programs. In transmission programs the majority of the pupils commonly speak one minority language. Initially education is given in their first language while they are taught the majority language. Gradually teaching is taught more in the majority language until all teaching is done only in that language. The transition period from using the first language in teaching to the use of the second language only varies, but seldom stretches over more than four years of schooling. In maintenance programs pupils are taught through the two languages throughout their education. In two-way programs both minority and majority speaking pupils are taught through the two languages. Baker shows that most favorable conditions for the development of bilingual competence are through maintenance and two-way programs (compare also Cummins 2000 and Thomas & Collier 2000). The results of the transmission programs are usually that pupils develop limited competence in the minority language. Although goals may be to promote bilingualism, as status is still connected to the majority language, the motivation among parents, pupils and teachers is usually manly directed towards developing that language (see for example King 1999, Hornberger & King 1998). As long as final exams are in the majority language only and opportunities for jobs and further education depends on the outcome, that language will receive most attention. However, pupils from minority groups generally reach higher achievement in transmission programs than in monolingual programs and Hornberger (200X) argues that transmission programs are important for giving minority speaking pupils voice in school. The planning of bilingual education in settings were included languages have not been standardised, inevitably encounters the question of divergent language varieties. Questions of choice of variety, which becomes particularly obvious in written forms, should be handled carefully. Hornberger (2005) shows how

curricula, pedagogy and social relations may be redirected towards inclusion of diverse language varieties in school.

In the specific case of Guatemala valuable research and plans for development have been conducted by researchers at the so called 'Academia de Lenguas Mayas' and associated institutions, particularly by the educational linguist Jose Luis Crisostomo (2005).

3 Background – Setting the context

Controversial as it could be, relevant statistics of Guatemala depict it as a country with a population slightly over the 11 000 000 inhabitants with an immense cultural and linguistic variety where 24 different languages are spoken. Guatemala can be defined as a multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual country, where the official language is Spanish. The national census of population from 2002, register 41 percentage of the population who consider themselves indigenous.

The World Bank Reports from 1994 and over a decade later (2005) presents Guatemala as one of the poorest countries in the Americas, with an annual GNP of US$ 930.. Over 60 percent of Guatemalans live in the rural areas and most of them are indigenous people. The history of the country is one of Ladino dominance over the indigenous, with occasional outbursts of violence from both sides. Such violence peaked in the early 1980s.

Considering that this is one of the countries with the highest historical levels of political violence in the region, approaching any area of Guatemalan society largely demands awareness of the past and present. Important aspects to be considered include the following. The modern history of Guatemala has unfortunately been one of deep social conflicts where issues of language, culture and identity have been linked to a profound social and economic

discrimination. The Peace Agreements (1996), which ended the long and blooded conflict, acknowledged that the indigenous populations have been particularly subject to levels of discrimination, exploitation and injustice due to their origin, culture and language. The same document states that the acknowledgment of the identity of the indigenous population is essential for the nation building based on the respect and the full exercise of the political, cultural, economic and spiritual rights of all the inhabitants of the country.

3.1 Education and languages in Guatemala

Linguistic studies reports 56 languages for Guatemala. Of those, 54 are living languages and 2 are extinct (Gordon, 2005). The different Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala have a history of more than 5 000 years of development. Spanish is the official language and was until recently the only language of instruction in education. It is spoken as a mother tongue by roughly half of the population; the other half speaks mainly Mayan languages. About 75 percent of the Mayan language speakers speak one of four Mayan languages Kaqchikel, Q'eqchi', Mam, and K'iche'. Rural indigenous people are often monolingual in their own language; the urban indigenous population are often bilingual in the Mayan language and in Spanish (Gordon, 2005). There is more is to be said about the educational problems of the country.In brief, during the 1960s the authorities recognized that that there was a higher rate of drop outs among Mayan children. In 1965 the government began a program of teaching Spanish to children in pre-primary classes (classes similar to kindergarten). They hired bilingual helpers, and offered classes in Spanish throughout many rural areas. By 1984, over 1,000 bilingual helpers were working with children from 10 different Mayan language groups. However, despite these efforts, education reached less than half of the population. Only 40 percent of the rural Mayans enrolled in school, and of those

who enrolled, 50 percent had dropped out by the end of grade one (Crisostomo, 2005; Reding, 2000).

4 Attempts to develop a comprehensive bilingual and multicultural education - National program for bilingual education (PRONEBI)

With financial assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development (A.I.D.), the government began a pilot project in bilingual education (1980-84). Its aim was to design linguistically and culturally relevant curricula for the four major language groups. The program used a transitional model of bilingual education, with the first language of the child being used as a bridge to the second language, Spanish. The pilot was implemented in pre-primary through grade two classrooms in 40 schools, 10 schools in each of the four main language areas. There were control groups in an additional 40 schools. Materials were developed and bilingual teachers were trained. By the end of the pilot period there were 5,600 children in the bilingual classes in the project schools. Results for the pilot classes were positive in terms of achievement and retention rates and parents were generally supportive (Cifuentes, 1988; Ministerio, 1995; Patrinos & Velez, 1996). In a follow-on project (1985-1993), A.I.D. supported an expansion of the program, which had by now attained official status as the National Program for Bilingual Education. PRONEBI (the acronym in Spanish), gradually expanded into 400 "complete" schools, 100 each in the four major language areas, pre-primary through grade four. In addition, it worked only with pre-primary in another 400 "incomplete" schools within the same language groups. By 1990, there were about 100,000 children in the 400 complete schools offering the program from preschool through grade four. During this phase of the program about 1,100 teachers taught in the PRONEBI schools. Of

these teachers, only 73 percent were bilingual in a Mayan language and Spanish, although the aim was that all of them would be bilingual. PRONEBI bilingual supervisors trained about 860 teachers, of which 730 were bilingual. Conducted in both a Mayan language and Spanish, the training included the use of the Mayan language in the classroom, the use of the textbook, bilingual education methodology, and some aspects of community development. During this period, PRONEBI changed the education model to a parallel model of bilingual education, with bilingual and bicultural objectives and with some mother tongue instruction from preschool through grade six. In most of the PRONEBI schools, however, where there were bilingual teachers, the time for each language was roughly as shown below (Cifuentes, 1998).

[Insert Table 1 here]

In a third project (1989-1995), A.I.D. assisted in the consolidation of PRONEBI. Linguistic maps were prepared so that the program could be adjusted according to the degree of monolingualism and bilingualism within the four Mayan language areas. Materials were revised to improve their usefulness in the classroom, and teacher training continued to improve teacher confidence and skill in the use of the Mayan language in the classroom (Crisostomo, 2005).

According to Crisostomo (2005) in general, PRONEBI has represented a remarkable reform in Guatemala's educational system. The ministry of education has focused attention on issues of quality and relevance in the rural curriculum. It has legitimized the use of the mother tongue by the students, who speak one of the four major indigenous languages and it has

empowered the bilingual teachers so that they are now a vocal part of the Guatemalan political scene.

4.1 Learning from PRONEBI

Through PRONEBI, Guatemala has confronted the problem of educating a significant part of the historically marginalized population of the country. Over the last decade and a half, it has given strong evidence that native speakers of the Mayan languages can succeed in Guatemalan schools if their first language is given support and development as they are learning the second language.

Crisostomo (2005) uses data from earlier evaluations to argue that there are at least four specific 'lessons' to be considered:

- Children can learn the language of wider communication if they begin their education, including the development of literacy, in their mother tongue. This learning draws upon cognitive development in the first language and is encouraged by the self-esteem which comes from acceptance and success;
- Educational and linguistic capacity is critical. There are now a number of Guatemalan university-educated educators and linguists, who advocate bilingual education;
- Political strategies are important. In the early years PRONEBI had strong political support from the top, among others from the President of the country, the Minister of Education, and high-level military officials, along with the continual support from the U.S.A.I.D. This support enabled it to survive, despite the extreme violence throughout the countryside during those early years; and

- These changes take time. They do not come easily within a society, and after more than 15 years there are still a considerable number of problems to solve.

The impact that this development had in the municipality in question is hard to determine.

5. The field study - method

A preliminary assumption for this study, which is also seen as a tenet for the further work to be done in the mentioned municipality, was that continuing to improve the knowledge of teachers in areas such as cultural diversity, relationship family-school, language and culture, democratic citizenship and classroom management is a primary and essential condition for all forthcoming developments. The question at this very point was to assess the extent of the problem. For that purpose a field study was organised by IM which aimed to provide valuable information from various kinds of actors and at the same time to facilitate *in situ* the access to documents and material relevant to the problem being investigated. A multi-methodological research strategy was assumed which was expected to gather different type of data relevant for the analysis of the problem.

Interviews were organised in five main groups as presented in the following:

- Group A. Officers within the educational system in three levels: (a) Ministry of Education, (b) Departmental authorities, (c) Local authorities.
- Group B. University or research institutions with expertise in Mayan culture, traditions and social cultural factors relevant to education.
- Group C. Teacher educators working with bilingual teacher training.
- Group D. Teacher educators working with monolingual teacher training.

- Group E. The "beneficiaries" of bilingual education: Children and parents in San Miguel

- Group F. Social Workers, NGO:s, working with community problems. The aim with interviews in this group was to find out the perception from these social actors about what they perceived as the most relevant social problems of children and youngsters and the impact that bilingual education could have on these problems[2].

The interviews were semi-structured and included at least four individuals in each category. The language used in the interviews was mainly Spanish. Interviews in the group E were conducted both in Spanish and Mam. The last one in cases of parents (grandparents in specific) who´s proficiency in Spanish was low. The interpreter was a bilingual teacher of Mayan background. Children were interviewed in Spanish. The structuring of the interviews covered four main aspects: (a) Why bilingualism / the relationship between Spanish and the mother tongue, (b) Priorities, (c) Positive experiences in bilingual education, and (d) Sustainability. Questions in group A were expected to help in understanding the linguistic problem; they were considered content-oriented. Questions in groups B, C, D were expected to provide substantial elements for the design of the intervention; development/intervention oriented.

The first aspect, *Why bilingualism / the relationship between Spanish and the mother tongue,* was expected to provide data about the specific values attributed to the Spanish language and to the mother tongue respectively. Further on this could hopefully provide information of relevance in relation to the following aspects:

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[2] During the field work the researchers realized that problems were far too complex. Too many variables for such a short study will considerably complicate the task and compromise the reliability of the study. Therefore within this group there was only one interview with the Priest of San Miguel Ixtahuacan who has had a very relevant role as cultural promoter.

- Concerning the categories affective value of language and practical value of language.

- The motivational factor (inner and outer motivation)

- Whether authorities have reflected on this issue (value of language); a distinction between real political decisions and symbolic political decisions; the forced vs. the desired (Graviz Machado, 1996)

In relation to the second aspect, *priorities*, the intention was to seek data that would contribute to clarify the various actors' perception concerning the following aspects:

- What is the level of priority concerning bilingual education in relation to other problems/needs of education in the country and in the specific area?

- What are the main priorities within bilingual education today andwhy, i.e., which arguments are used. Three areas in focus were: training teachers (capacity building), curriculum development (content of education), and material facilities (infrastructure)

In summary, considering that in the specific conditions of this environment almost everything seems to be a priority and the scope of the project does not make it possible to cover all needs, the intention with this field study was to investigate the perception of the different actors about where the main focus of the intervention should be placed (priority) and the arguments for this..

Concerning the third aspect, *the identification of positive experiences in bilingual education*, the main idea is learning from successful experiences rather than focusing on the negative ones. This was to be done with three main aspects in focus: (a) identification of successful experiences, (b) identification of the characteristics of the successful models and (c) identification of a 'successful strategy'.

The sustainability of a possible intervention was also consider of major relevance. Here the aim was to find out the views of different actors about the elements that might guarantee long term sustainability of an intervention in bilingual education.

Interviews were considered to be one of the central methods to collect relevant data. This however should be supported by other forms of gathering information, among them:

- Team work. Analysis and discussion of relevant documentation, policy papers, national experiences in teacher education, etc, with colleagues from the bilingual teacher training institute in San Miguel, other teacher education institutions and research institutions. This should include a detailed study of the structure of the present teacher education in San Miguel Ixtahuacan and their experiences in bilingual education.

- Visit to at least two local schools representative for the population of the schools in the area and if possible where teacher students will be doing practice or graduates will be working . This included observation of one lesson at each school and interview with one teacher and/or headmaster

- Analysis *in situ* of material conditions and resources needed for a possible intervention

This work was done having as a ground the tenet that the intervention could not succeed without a detailed analysis of the specific context in which it was going to be made. This concerns from the socioeconomic situation, historical and cultural aspects up to the very issue of bilingual education seen in its past, present and future perspectives of development. Much of what is presented in the following is consistent with the mentioned rationale.

6. Highlights from the interviews

Those interviewed in group A included officers within the educational system at the Ministry of Education, departmental authorities and local authorities in the municipality of San Miguel Miguel Ixtahuacan.

While answering the question: "Why bilingualism?" and the question about the relationship between Spanish and the mother tongue, those interviewed largely stressed the relevance of language in direct relationship with the identity of the Mayan population and the role of Spanish as the representative language of the dominating culture.

> There is little we could do in relation to the cultural identity of the indigenous population as long as their language continues to be segregated and considered an old language not connected to modernity. The hard part is that for centuries we have talked about this as a second issue and no one has seriously put the issue on the agenda and there has been a lot of fear about bringing the issue to public debate. First during the colonial period and afterwards during the republic, the situation has not changed much. Identifying oneself with claims about indigenous language has been regarded as leftist and communist and the consequences of language activism were life threatening. (Interviewed 1)

Most of those interviewed pointed out that Spanish has always been the administrative language and that the constitution has played a very important role in keeping the privileged status of this language. Most agreement was found about the value of the native language. Several of the subjects interviewed referred to the relevance that both languages go "hand in hand" in everydayness. A common argument was also the cultural heritage embedded in this language and the relevance to continue developing it. Spanish language has been, says an interviewed, a "very important link" that has allowed communication across the different indigenous languages and with a major cultural group.

Concerning priorities there was more agreement within this group on the relevance of capacity building.

We have received valuable support from different projects and international donors. PRONEBI was a positive example. However our experiences in most of the cases is that we get a lot of materials produced, sometimes buildings and facilities are created but again there is always the same problem; when the project finishes then everything starts to go back to the starting point. The amount of our people, especially staff in the schools that is properly trained to face the reality of bilingual classroom and the problems of diversity is extremely limited and in some areas one can say, almost non-existent. (Interviewed, 2)

In relation to positive experiences in bilingual education, PRONEBI is much mentioned in the interviews as a reference when it comes to a major program with nationalscope in Guatemala. At the local level specific successful cases are mentioned like the work of teacher training at the municipality of *Comitancillo* in the Department of San Marcos. Several references are also made to the experiences in the Department of El Quiche.

I think that if we are to talk about specific cases of success then Comitancillo has to be mentioned. In that place in the teacher training the language that is used both in every day communication and in work meetings is Mam. Everyone seems to have understood that Mam is our language and we shall use it on regular bases although everyone speaks fluent Spanish. I think the people there are more proud of their roots than in other places. This is very much the same in El Quiché. (Interviewed 3)

The answers of the interviewed in this group concerning sustainability of any effort to change the present situation coincide in referring experiences from earlier projects and the lack of continuity.

In general in all levels, whether interviews at the Ministry of education or with educational officers in intermediate and lower levels, different issues related to capacity

building are perceived to be of major relevance in order to guarantee the sustainability of any effort to improve the present situation of bilingual and intercultural education.

The interviews within group B included university and research institutions with expertise in Mayan culture, traditions and social cultural factors relevant to education. Most of the aspects highlighted in the earlier presented group were also common here. An aspect that was mentioned was the complexities resulting from the very varied language landscape of the country. Some of the interviewed argued that this was a limiting factor to a national effort to improve bilingual education

> We have so many different languages and dialectal variants within them that it is really a hard task to develop bilingual education. Sometimes the material we produce belongs to a particular dialectal variant of the language and the other linguistic communities refuse to accept it because it is considered that it will deprive their own language. This is a serious problem and I think that in producing school material we have to pay close attention to this linguistic aspect. (Interviewed 4)

However this rational was heavily contested by other participants within the same group and in the earlier group.

> I think that the anthropologists and linguists have often done a considerable damage to bilingualism by stressing the differences so much. You have cases of researchers who come here and write a Ph. D. based on their experience with a small community, and then they go out to the world to prove the uniqueness of that language spoken in the place, arguments that are later used by those who only see the limitations in developing a true bilingual education. (Interviewed 5)

The argument of linguistic diversity as an obstacle to further development of bilingual education is heavily contested by many of the interviewed based on solid research documentation

We can probe with our research work for more than ten years that there are significant linguistic components bridging our different languages. With very simple adjustment and clarification a text in a language, for instance Mam, could be used by the entire community speaking this language in the country. Even though it is a reality that we have absolute differences between many of our Mayan languages there is always a possibility to design a strategy allowing the production and use of material across a broad sector of dialectal variants. (Interviewed 5)

Concerning priorities and alternatives of sustainability, this group coincide with group A in highlighting the relevance of competence development and capacity building for educational staff.

The main problem that we have is the preparation of our teachers and educators in general to face the challenges of a multicultural country with a very rich linguistic diversity. If anything is to be done that is expected to have some sustainability it should focus on competence development and this is both in educational training and the knowledge of our indigenous languages and cultural traditions. (Interviewed 6)

Interviewed in groups C and D, that is teacher educators working with bilingual teacher training and teacher educators working with common teacher training respectively, agreed considerably with the highlights presented from the interviews in other groups. Curriculum development is particularly mentioned as important for sustainability

One of the things that has affected us considerably is the poor development of the education of bilingual teacher training, particularly at college level (Institutos Diversificados de Formación de Maestros Bilingues). The curricula that are now being used are often just copies from programs arranged by donors. This is the case in our institution. (Interviewed 7)

Relevant here is also the reference made by some of the interviewed to the lack of a well defined profile of the graduated in the education given in one bilingual teacher training institutions investigated. Analysis of different documents from the teacher training centre in question indicated that the whole education lacked general planning and a clear vision of what was expected from the graduated in terms of professional competence to work

in bilingual classrooms. A recently graduated teacher from this teacher training centre claimed, when asked what her main duty as a bilingual teacher was:

> My most important duty is that children that are Mam speakers will be able to communicate with me as teacher and that they could soon understand Spanish. In this way they will advance more in their education and will be able to acquire a deeper knowledge in the different school subjects. (Interviewed 8)

Further analysis of this response is presented in the next section. Different criticism to the situation of teacher education is presented by the interviewed in the following terms

> The present situation of our teacher education is rather precarious; not to talk about in-service teacher education. As for the first we have people in at least two universities, Landivar and Mariano Galvez, who had done quite a lot to improve teacher bilingual teacher education but the reality is that as they are private universities and not many of our indigenous people can afford to study there, get well prepared and then bring the experience to the communities. It is very hard to tell where we can start to change things when everything is in such a situation. I should say that we need a better curriculum for training teachers at the same time that basic infrastructure should be guaranteed. (Interviewed 9)

The interviews in group E, i.e., the "beneficiaries" of bilingual education, children, youngsters and parents, provided new important elements particularly concerning the question: "Why bilingualism?" and the question of the relationship between Spanish and the mother tongue.

> I speak in Mam at home and Spanish here in the school. For everything, for saying beautiful things and also when I am angry I use Mam. When I talk to my grandma I always use Mam, she would not understand if I spoke Spanish. But in the school it's different, in the first class I spoke Mam because I did not know much Spanish. My father insists also that I should speak good Spanish to be able to continue my studies when I will be older. (Interviewed 9)

The interview with a representative of Group F, i.e., social workers and NGO-representatives working with the communities' problems, also pointed out that

> For centuries since the colonial period the indigenous language has been segregated and
> degraded. These centuries of discrimination are seen today even in the attitude of some of the
> indigenous people. It is not surprising that many of them are not interested in their children
> learning the Mayan languages well "What for?" they ask. [...] only a good knowledge of
> Spanish is seen as the path to success in this society. (Interviewed 10)

The response from these individuals somehow illustrates a situation that, in relation to language, is an expression of the long lasting impacts from colonization and the subsequent neo-colonial stage. This concerns particularly the dominance of a language (i.e., Spanish) that is very much associated to power structures of society and possibilities for individual development.

7. The intervention - concluding remarks

Several of the responses to the questions related to the arguments for bilingualism and the relationship between Spanish and the mother tongue (Mayan language) seems apparently in contradiction. Indigenous languages are in all cases considered relevant but still Spanish is seen as the gate to the 'outer world'. There are indications to assume that the contradiction that Graviz Machado (1996) mentioned does not apply to this situation; in other words a distinction between real political decisions and symbolic political decisions; the forced vs. the desired. Driving forces of development are likely to be professional at all levels that seemed to be seriously committed to the advance of bilingual education. The extent to which their ambitions will have the needed back up to go from ideas to practices is hard to assess in the present situation of the country and the municipality.

Another important problem appears in the information provided by some of the persons interviewed (e.g., nr 8) and also in what was observed through the visit to schools in San Miguel Ixtahuacan. Rather than bilingual education, what has currently been experienced in the so called bilingual schools is the use of the Mayan languages as a bridge to the mastering of Spanish language. Mam is simply used when children starts schooling as a resource to make them learn Spanish. As soon as they are perceived to understand and speak Spanish, the whole situation in the classroom becomes that of a monolingual space with absolute predominance of Spanish. Mam becomes a second language at its best in what could be well related to bilingual education of the tranmistion type (c.g. Baker, 2006)

In the response from several of the interviewed, competence development and capacity building comes out as central aspects. The efforts to develop bilingual and intercultural education in this context will not be sustainable if the work does not involve the community and a process of creating awareness concerning a language and a culture that has been neglected for centuries.

7.1 Towards a strategy of change

A central question at this stage is: what is possible to do in a small municipality located within a major context of social problems that could be useful, sustainable and have a certain level of future impact? A short response concluding this study is: capacity building! The economical problems are so far overwhelming; contributions from small donors might help but still will be a "grain of sand". Focusing the resources on capacity building linked to activities of social concretization could make an impact in the community and benefit the education of children from this impoverished and much discriminated social community. The fact that Mam

language is recognized in education, is likely to have positive effect not only on peoples' self-esteem but also on educational outcome

Following earlier analysis of the context according political and social development in Guatemala, there are no few risk factors to be considered which could hinder any intervention or development intention. One of the factors that could hamper or interfere in the implementation of the intervention is changes in the local authorities. Due to the lack of a democratic culture, despite of the positive development in the last ten years, there are considerable political tensions and rivalries.

The following remarks are much a result of this summarizing and visualization of what we considered essential to take into consideration for a potential intervention. A strategy of actions to support bilingual education in the municipality in question through an intervention/development project should give attention to at least the following aspects.

- Selection and appointment of one Program Coordinator; expert in bilingual education who will act as general facilitator of the activities and internal evaluator

- Selection of the educational promoters who could contribute to increasing the education of in-service teachers and act as promoters of the changes needed

- Training of the educational promoters with courses of relevance to the educational problems of the area, and who could fulfil the need training needs of the teachers, e.g. issues of Mam language and Mayan cultural identity, management of diversity in the classroom, group dynamics and active methods of teaching and gender, democracy and citizenship education

- Creating a system of group work with teachers of bilingual schools, e.g. circles of quality, aimed to increase the knowledge of Mam language, Mayan identity and to increase the participants' pedagogical competence .

The work with the community is extremely relevant in an environment where Mayan language has been neglected and confined to use at home In this respect it is useful to consider the following aspects:

- Organizing activities, such as a yearly educational and cultural meeting of bilingual Education in San Miguel Ixtahuacan, making the Mam language more visible to the whole community, though to an extent contributing to break its present confinement.
- Using the mass media of the community is of major relevance, for instance radio programs in the local broadcasting station aimed to strengthen the Mam language and cultural identity oriented both to children and adults.
- As a part of work of promotion of the Mam culture and language at community level it will be very valuable to organize activities such as a yearly festival of the Mam language and culture in the main town or as it will be considered more feasible from an organizational point of view.
- In line with the above intention it will be relevant to elaborate and put into practice a yearly school plan for the promotion of Mam language and culture, including its systemic follow up and evaluation. The plan should result in a collective work involving teachers, children and parents.

Despite the existence of considerable material in Mam language, the dialectal differences demands adaptation of this materials to the language spoken in the community. In

addition to that there is also a need to print material of various kinds that could serve to the purposes of diffusion of language and cultural issues in the community. Elaboration and printing of material to support bilingual education both in the schools and in the community is therefore an important task to be included in a strategy of action.

As it has been earlier presented there are in the country cases of positive outcome in working with bilingualism. Exchange of experiences with successful cases should be a part of the strategy of capacity building and strengthening language and cultural identity in the municipality. There is in addition a need to allocate resources to building or renovating physical facilities (classrooms) particularly in the most impoverished areas of the municipality.

Back to the core issue of this article 'Bilingualism and bilingual education in complex contexts. As far as our empirical work and earlier research concerns, there is considerable evidence to argue that contextual factors have significant impact and a leading role in what is often perceived by practitioners, beneficiaries of the education and even by researchers, as problem of language. In this context, language is not the problem but on the contrary, it is a main factor that results in the huge gaps and divides in the society that this article refers to.

8 Discussion

When we, as researchers from the rich, western part of the world, carry out research in settings in poor areas like in this case, it is important that we take local societal and cultural factors into account and that we show respect to the poor conditions people live in. The implementation of bilingual education is highly integrated in other parts of societal life. This

case of the introducing and developing of bilingual transitional education in the municipality of San Miguel Ixtahuacan in Guatemala has been carried out in a poor context and under instable conditions through the financing by and under the supervision of expatriate donors. The answers by some of the interviewed persons clearly demonstrate their awareness of that fact. Taking the view of language as a recourse, it becomes clear that the including of students' language in early education in this case has had positive outcome, probably both concerning educational outcome and students' self-esteem. There is also no doubt that the introduction of bilingual education has led to consciousness-raising and self-esteem regarding the inhabitants' Mayan identity and language. Could we from this conclude that they have also been given voice, to use the concept of Ruiz (1984) and Hornberger (2005)? This is impossible to say without closer examining of the settings in classrooms but perhaps one could say that the possibility for the Mayan people to make their voices heard has slightly increased. Making space in school for language and ethnicity of groups that have earlier been marginalised and perceived as lower status promotes students' active participation not only in their construction of knowledge but also in the creation of their own identities (Hornberger 2005). However, the question of varieties of different languages, such as what in this case was mentioned as dialects of the Mayan language, is a question that is apparent in most cases when non-standardised languages are to be used in education, particularly when it comes to literacy and textbooks. Difference between varieties becomes more obvious when they appear in written form. The simply way to solve this question is to favour one variety in relation to others. This is likely to create new conflicts among groups of people as this is connected to status and usually also to power. Another way, perhaps less simple but probably more sustainable when it comes to strengthening less valued languages, is to include linguistic diversity in classrooms. Cummins (2006) and Hornberger (2005) have shown that allowing different language varieties in classrooms may be particularly positive for students from

marginalized groups. Hornberger (2006) claims that inclusion of their voices in classrooms may enhance the student's own learning and promote the maintenance and revitalization of their languages.This approach to multilingualism is also more relevant in a globalised world were language diversity is the rule rather than monolingualism or even bilingualism. This is however easier to implement in oral than written language use. This also means that we have to create new views on language and learning particularly in classroom settings. This might be a case were rich, western countries that in many cases are less used to linguistic diversity in school, may learn from examples from poorer settings, such as this one in Guatemala.

Short biographical notes

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Table 1. Time for Mayan language and Spanish language in PRONEBI schools (Cifuentes, 1998).

	Mayan languages	Spanish
Preprimary:	85-90 percent	10-15 percent
Grade 1:	80 percent	20 percent
Grade 2:	60 percent	40 percent
Grade 3:	50 percent	50 percent
Grade 4:	50 percent	50 percent
Grade 5:	0 percent	100 percent

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