

Language-in-education Policies in the South Pacific: Some Possibilities for Consideration

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Language-in-education policies in the South Pacific have arisen out of the historical circumstances of the countries and have been largely *de facto* 'policies' that have tended to emphasise a metropolitan high-status language to the comparative neglect of the development of the indigenous languages. This paper discusses research related to bilingual education as a means of providing background information for policy makers, and then discusses a number of bilingual education models. With this background, the paper then suggests separate models of language-in-education policies for the Melanesian, Micronesian/Polynesian parts of the South Pacific and for Fiji. It concludes with a suggestion how such policy making might proceed so that both costs and fear of the new can be contained.

Introduction

The issue of language of instruction at primary school in South Pacific (SP) countries (restricted to those served by the University of the South Pacific) cannot be resolved by simply importing a model that has worked in another country. It has to be evaluated in terms of the context in which it occurs and compared with the conditions found in the local context. While it is unhelpful to accept a model from another country uncritically, it is equally unhelpful to reject a model from outside without giving it critical consideration.

This paper discusses some bilingual models and their reported outcomes before presenting some models of bilingual education that may be of relevance to the SP countries. They are presented as models for consideration and as a springboard for focused discussion on language-in-education policies. Finally, a suggestion is made for taking language-in-education policies in the South Pacific context forward.

Throughout this paper it is assumed that the SP countries will continue to make use of a L2, a metropolitan language such as English or French, in their educational system.

The South Pacific Context

In this paper, the use of the term 'South Pacific countries' will be restricted to those countries which are served by the University of the South Pacific, with its main campus in Suva, Fiji, but excluding the more recent member of the university, Marshall Islands in the North Pacific. The eastern island countries, which are Polynesian, are characterised by having one main, predominant indigenous language used in each of them. These are Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Kiribati and Nauru, with the last two more properly known as Micronesian languages. (Recently, however, Lynch, 1998, has argued that Cook

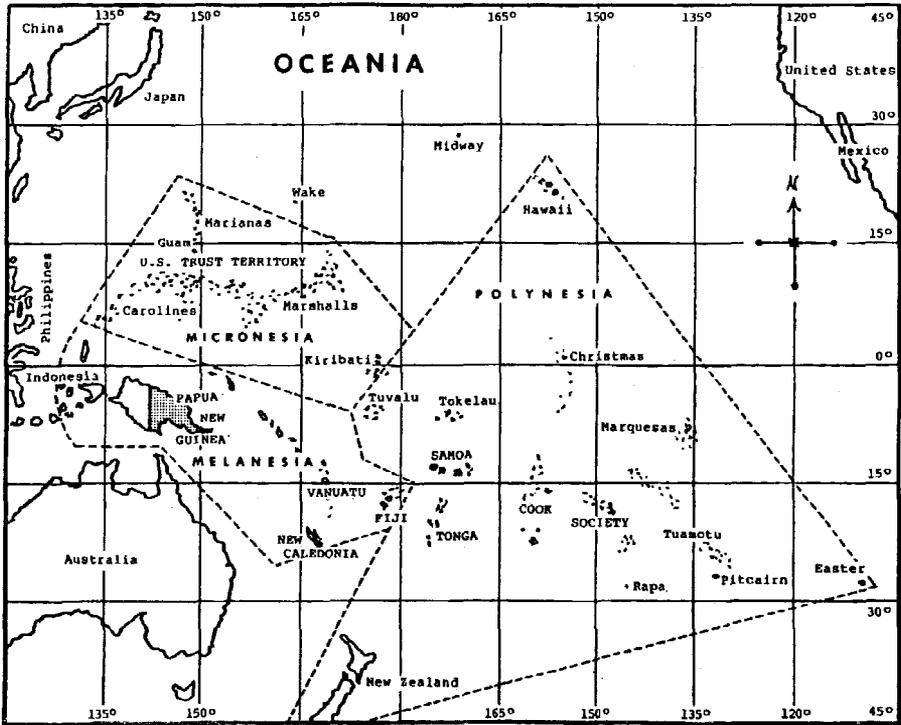


Figure 1 The South Pacific region

Islands has technically three languages and Tonga two but there is predominance of one language that makes them largely 'monolingual' and they will, for the purposes of this paper, be treated so.) The western Pacific islands, the Melanesian part of the South Pacific, comprise Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, both of which have many languages, approximately 63 and 105 respectively (Lynch, 1998). In addition, Vanuatu has two metropolitan languages, with ni-Vanuatu students going through English or French medium schools. Both countries also have a well-established English-based (or English-lexifier) pidgin, called Pijin in Solomon Islands, and Bislama in Vanuatu.¹ Bordering both the Polynesian and Melanesian parts of the South Pacific is Fiji, which has a number of dialects of Fijian (Geraghty, 1984), and a multiplicity of Indian languages: Hindi, Gujerati, Punjabi, Urdu, Telegu, Tamil, Malayalam (Mugler, 1996), and a number of minority languages, the most prominent being Rotuman. The populations of the countries range widely also, from about 800,000 in Fiji to numbers below 2000 in Niue. The whole area is characterised by varying levels of bilingualism and trilingualism (Mugler & Lynch, 1996). Different domains, participants, and contexts draw upon different languages in many of these countries.

Historically in the SP countries the choice of language of instruction in formal settings has been driven by pragmatic concerns. Missionary schools, set up in the 19th century in the eastern part of the South Pacific, for example, chose to introduce initial literacy in the language of the people so that they could read Bible stories in the vernacular. These early schools were designed to impart basic literacy and some numeracy. The primary purpose of such literacy was to enable

people to read the Bible (and Bible stories) in the vernacular (Mangubhai, 1986). In the early part of the 20th century a metropolitan language such as English came to be increasingly used in schools, especially at upper levels of the system.

In the eastern countries, such as Tonga, Samoa and Cook Islands, the current 'policy' is for the L1 (that is, the first language, mother tongue, vernacular) to be used as the medium of instruction in primary schools with a switch to English at secondary level, generally Grade 7 (Siegel, 1996). There is also, however, a considerable amount of Tongan (Thaman, 1996) and Samoan (Lo Bianco & Liddicoat, 1991) used in secondary classrooms, with code-switching between L1 and English quite common. In the Solomon Islands, English is the official language of the formal school system, but Pijin is widely used (Jourdan, 1990). In Vanuatu, English or French is the official language of the formal school system, but Bislama is also widely used unofficially (Lynch, 1996; Thomas, 1990). In Fiji, L1 is used for the first three years officially, and as in many other countries, it is common to find, especially where classes are largely or solely Fijian or Indo-Fijian, that the L1 will be used to explain content to students (Mugler, 1996; Tamata, 1996).

The current position seems to be one where there is a reluctance to seriously tackle the language-in-education policies. Practice does not reflect the Ministry of Education policies, and, as Mugler (1996: 281) claims 'throughout the Pacific region, vernaculars are often used at levels and for subjects for which English is supposed to be the sole medium of instruction'.

The relationship between L1 and L2 proficiency and achievement

In a discussion of the relationship that exists between L1 proficiency and the subsequent L2 (i.e. a third language) proficiency, it is all too easy to make simplistic statements about this relationship. A language does not operate in a vacuum: it operates in a sociocultural and sociopolitical milieu. In a multilingual country, the choice of language X as a medium of instruction or the language of initial literacy for all necessarily advantages the speakers of that language over the speakers of language Y. This is a sociopolitical reality for which the solution or solutions are not simple. It is neither as simple as claiming that learners with language Y background will necessarily underachieve in a school system, as other factors, such as societal attitudes to the group and its language, and the power relationships, contribute to the outcomes as well (see, for example, Cummins, 1986). These non-school-based factors need to be kept in mind in a discussion of language-in-education policy.

The context of minority languages in the midst of a majority, high-status language

Minority languages cannot be discussed in the same way in the South Pacific context as they can be in, say, the American, Canadian or Australian contexts where the minority languages are regarded as contrasting with a high-status language such as English or French. In Solomon Islands and Vanuatu there are a number of minority languages (Crowley, 2000; Crowley & Lynch, 1986), but with none having a predominance through numbers or status. Rotuman and Kiribati (used on Rabi Island) can be regarded as minority languages in Fiji, though the former appears ethnolinguistically quite vital. To this can be added, for example,

the dialectal differences found in Fiji (Geraghty, 1984) or in the Cook Islands (Siegel, 1996).

There is growing evidence that minority-language children who undertake the early part of their formal education in their mother tongue and initially learn the majority second language as a subject in the curriculum learn the second language as well as, if not better, than those students who begin their education in a second language (Greene, 1997; Ramirez *et al.*, 1991, cited in C. Baker, 2001: 249; Willig, 1985). This area is, however, not without debate, particularly in the USA (see, for example, K. Baker & de Kanter, 1983; K. Baker & Rossell, 1993; Porter, 1990; Secada, 1990; and the current debates about bilingual education in the USA), though some of these debates may be related to whether the government policies are assimilationist or pluralist in the context of the USA, while others may be related to the issue of time-on-task, that is, the more time spent on L2, the better. This debate underscores the fact that research findings can appear to be inconclusive or contradictory. These seemingly contradictory results suggest that contextual factors may play more critical roles than has been acknowledged previously and that reports need to present much richer descriptions of the contexts in which bilingual or monolingual education has been evaluated. They also show, as Cummins (1999) argues, that various studies that have purported to look at the effects of bilingual education need to be interpreted within the framework of a theory which needs to be subjected to the process of falsifiability.

Much of the research into minority languages and their educational ramifications has looked at literacy and its positive impact upon subsequent literacy in a second language (Dutcher, 1982; Holm & Holm, 1990; Modiano, 1973) or has shown that beginning literacy in L1 makes students literate in their L1 without any negative impact upon the levels of literacy achieved in L2 (Williams, 1996). In those contexts where minority-language children are required to begin their education in the majority second language, the scholastic results can be variable depending upon a number of factors including the particular language and cultural background, how they view themselves and are viewed by the larger society and so forth. In general, however, when the contextual factors do not favour a group of minority-language speakers they are likely to do less well (Genesee, 1987). Current research evidence suggests that, under the right circumstances, beginning literacy in the L1 (in minority or multilingual contexts) does not necessarily adversely affect the development of literacy in the second language. The bonus is that one also achieves a sound level of literacy in the L1 as Williams (1996) shows in the African context.

Majority language children beginning their education in the second language

In an early, well-known study in the Rizal province in the Philippines (Ramos *et al.*, 1967), the researchers wanted to find out when formal reading in English should be introduced after English had been introduced in its oral form, and to find out at which grade level the switch to English as a medium of instruction was most effective in terms of subject learning. Students were assigned to groups under one of the five conditions, whether English literacy was introduced in Grade 1 or 2, and the different grade levels (1, 3 and 5) at which English became

the language of instruction. The results obtained showed that it did not matter whether L2 literacy was introduced in Grade 1 or Grade 2. In other words, teaching literacy first in Tagalog did not adversely affect achievement in English. The study also found that English proficiency was related to the number of years it was used as a medium of instruction. This was not true of Tagalog, however.

The results in this study are unlike the results obtained with minority language children in a society in which another language is the dominant one. It is not clear, however, whether the children who began their study in English from Grade 1 continued to develop in Tagalog or whether their proficiency in English was obtained at the expense of their mother tongue. Another factor that might have influenced the result was that the Tagalog teachers were less well trained than the ESL teachers (Engle, 1975).

Another, contextually more relevant, study conducted in the Philippines found that the bilingual education policy in Filipino (based on Tagalog) and English favoured the Tagalog-speaking students and those students living in Manila and attending good private schools. There was a high correlation between skills in English and Filipino, with most skills transferring from English to Filipino. However, there was evidence also of some Filipino skills transferring to English from Grade 4 onwards.

The best-known examples of majority-language children undertaking their education, wholly or partially, through a L2 are the immersion programmes (Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Swain & Lapkin, 1982). Their success has been well documented (Berthold, 1992; Genesee, 1987; Lorch *et al.*, 1992). The success of these programmes (and in some cases, failure) has led to discussions of additive and subtractive bilingualism (Cummins, 1984). When a second language and culture are acquired in a context where the learners' first language is valued and there are no pressures to replace it with the L2, an additive form of bilingualism occurs. On the other hand, if there is pressure to learn the L2 and the first language and culture are not valued (or actively denigrated) there is a likelihood of subtractive bilingualism. Children may not learn the L2 well and neither may they develop in their L1 since it would not be offered in the school context. This concept has been used to explain the differences in results obtained in bilingual programmes in different contexts (see C. Baker, 2001 for a discussion of these concepts).

Another explanation that has been offered to make sense of the results in bilingual programmes is the interdependence hypothesis which claims that academic language proficiency transfers across languages so that students with well-developed L1 literacy will make speedier progress in the acquisition of L2 literacy (Cummins, 1984). Equally, this hypothesis would support the claim that students with well-developed literacy in L2 can make speedier progress in the acquisition of L1 literacy. This hypothesis and the previous one help to explain results which, on the surface, look contradictory.

Types of Bilingual Programmes

In this section various types of bilingual programmes that may have some relevance for the SP countries are discussed. It is acknowledged that not all the models are applicable in all countries but they have been presented here in order

Table 1 Types of bilingual programmes

| <i>Weak forms of education for bilingualism</i> | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|--------------------------------|
| <i>Type of programme</i> | <i>Typical type of child</i> | <i>Language of the classroom</i> | <i>Societal and educational aim</i> | <i>Aim in language outcome</i> |
| Submersion (structured immersion) | Language minority | Majority language | Assimilation | Monolingualism |
| Transitional bilingual programme Type I* | Language minority | Moves from minority to majority language | Assimilation | Relative monolingualism |
| Mainstream with foreign language teaching* | Language minority | Majority language with L2/foreign language lessons | Limited enrichment | Limited bilingualism |
| <i>Strong forms of education for bilingualism and biliteracy</i> | | | | |
| Immersion bilingual education | Language majority | Bilingual with initial emphasis on L2 | Pluralism and enrichment | Bilingualism and biliteracy |
| Transitional bilingual programme Type II | Language majority | Moves from majority language (not high status outside the speakers) to a high-status language | Pluralism, maintenance, enrichment and economic reasons | Bilingualism and biliteracy |
| Maintenance/heritage or community languages | Language minority | Bilingual with emphasis on L1 | Maintenance, pluralism and enrichment | Bilingualism and biliteracy |
| Two-way/dual language* | Mixed language minority and majority or just minority | Minority and majority | Maintenance, pluralism and enrichment | Bilingualism and biliteracy |

Source: adapted from C. Baker (1996: 175).

* These types are not discussed in this paper.

to provide a broader framework within which South Pacific educators can consider language-in-education policies. For each type, where it is possible, as well as helpful, implications are drawn for (1) educational authorities, (2) schools, (3) teachers, (4) parents, (5) students, and (6) for the type of materials required in classrooms. Some of the programmes discussed talk about minority children but this term is not used in the SP countries. Part of the reason for not talking about them – and there are small pockets of minority children in many countries, as mentioned earlier – is that major educational issues have to do with majority children also.

Following C. Baker (1996), bilingual programmes will be divided into weak and strong forms of education for bilingualism and biliteracy. However, not all of them will be discussed, as some are rather less relevant for the SP countries. They are presented in Table 1. In drawing implications from the different types of programmes it is recognised that the diversity of language situations in the coun-

tries discussed in this paper necessarily means that some implications will be relevant for some countries but not others. In most cases, it will be obvious whether the remarks apply to a particular country or not. No, or very little, account is taken of children's various first languages.

Submersion

This type of programme places L1 children into a classroom where only, or largely, the L2 is used. The children have to learn the L2 as best they can so that they can then use it to learn the school subjects. The children have a constant struggle in the classroom and unless they are highly motivated and/or highly intelligent may give up and get themselves labelled as academically weak.

Implications for SP countries

If South Pacific children begin their formal education in classes where the language of instruction is either English or French, then they are likely to encounter difficulties in acquiring literacy – at least in the short term – and hence in the acquisition of curriculum content also. This is likely to be especially true of those children who do not have any contact with the English or French language prior to entering a formal system, and may be true to varying degrees for urban children, depending upon whether they have had informal exposure to the L2. What are the implications for the various stakeholders in education?

- *Educational authorities:* This type of programme raises issues of equity for children in the outlying islands. Urban children are much more likely to be exposed to some English or French and certainly a lot more print in the L2. There is also the question of whether L1 is to be taught as a subject and when or whether literacy is developed in it also. For countries like the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, there is the additional factor of whether the lingua franca, Pijin and Bislama, is to be taught in school and which L1 is to be taught.
- *Schools:* What types of programmes will develop proficiency in the metropolitan language quickly? Should these programmes be largely meaning-based or structural? What types of resources will be required to facilitate the acquisition of a second language and literacy in it?
- *Teachers:* What strategies can they use to speed up the processes of learning a second language so that it can be used for learning subjects in the school curriculum? Have teachers acquired an understanding of how second languages can be learned more efficiently and effectively? What sort of strategies can they use to make the second language comprehensible to students? How aware are teachers of the types of problems their students are likely to encounter?
- *Parents:* How can they ensure that a high-status, metropolitan language does not swamp their own language and culture?
- *Students:* Can the students cope with a period of cognitive confusion until their language skills develop enough to make sense of the linguistic input?
- *Programme materials:* To introduce a second language at primary level effectively and to teach students to read in it, materials that portray familiar situations need to be produced. This eases the burden of comprehension considerably and reduces frustration.

Transitional bilingual programme Type II

The Type II programme is different from the Type I largely in terms of the context in which it occurs. Unlike Type I typical students, the Type II students come from a majority group and the goal of the programme is to produce bilinguals who are also biliterate. The societal goals may include maintenance of the L1, as well as the use of the L2 for economic reasons. Students typically begin in their L1 and after a few years change to a L2 as the medium of instruction.

In the eastern part of the South Pacific and Fiji, children typically begin their education in their L1 (or a dialectal variation of it) and learn English as their second language from Grade 1, with reading in English introduced in Grade 2. The medium of instruction changes in Grade 4 in Fiji, for example, and after Grade 6 in Tonga and Samoa, but there is frequently not a sharp divide initially between mother tongue and English as languages of instruction. Many teachers continue to use the mother tongue in the classroom even when officially it should be English, or use both languages in the same lessons, translating from one to another (Lo Bianco & Liddicoat, 1991; Siegel, 1996; Singh, 1997; Tamata, 1996).

Implications for SP countries

- *Educational authorities:* One of the major implications of this model of bilingual education for educational authorities is the need to decide when to make a switch from the vernacular language to a metropolitan language (officially, at least, and is tied up with language-in-education policies). In those countries where Grade 1 is generally (officially) taught in a metropolitan language, as in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, the key question for educational authorities is that if there is to be a change in the initial language of instruction, which of the many languages should it be? Or should Pijin or Bislama be used initially? The choice of an indigenous language or languages among many competing languages is a difficult political decision. One possible solution is to look at the model developed in Papua New Guinea which seems to have met with considerable success: the *Village Tok Ples Skuls*. (The education reforms of the 1990s have changed the operation of these schools, though their success in the earlier form cannot be doubted.) These programmes begin at pre-school with children learning in their local language and continue for one or two years before children enter the formal primary school system, called Community Schools. These programmes are discussed further in the section on Heritage languages.

The switch at Grade 4 into L2 immersion can be bridged by innovative programmes such as the Book Flood Program carried out by Elley and Mangubhai (1983).

- *Schools:* The schools' responsibilities lie in the fact that they are charged with the task of developing skills in L1 and at the same time with preparing students' second language abilities to a level that will allow them to cope with the increasingly more complex learning materials and concepts in that language. If, as discussed previously, language skills (including academic language skills) in L1 have been developed well, their transfer to a second language should be easier. In some cases, it may be necessary to provide special resources to students to help bridge the gap between the two

languages when they reach the switching point for the medium of instruction.

- *Programme materials:* A transitional programme has a number of ramifications for the type of materials used in classrooms. During the period when the mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction the instructional materials should be pedagogically sound. There has been a tendency to suppose that since the teaching is occurring in the vernacular the instructional materials need not have the highest pedagogical quality. In addition, it has often been assumed that one textbook in L1 would be sufficient, disregarding the need for other reading materials that would assist students to understand the subject matter better (see, for example, Balawa, 1996; Ielemia, 1996). In other words, considerably more effort and finance would need to be devoted to producing supplementary materials in the L1 so that students have a richer source from which to learn. Resources are also needed for the second language, though in most cases these are more readily available from metropolitan countries. However, such material, if not carefully chosen, may deal with concepts that might be foreign to SP children. Some attempt should be made, as Fiji, Tonga and Samoa have, to develop children's readers in L2 (and L1) that deal with events with which SP children can identify much more easily (see, for example, Moore, 1987).

Immersion bilingual education

As stated earlier, there has been much written on immersion programmes, their types and their successes. If by definition immersion programmes are those where students deal with all or some of their subjects through the medium of a L2, the programmes in many urban schools in Fiji certainly, and some in the urban areas of other countries of the South Pacific, have a form of immersion programme. However, these immersion programmes are different from those discussed in say, the Canadian context, and do not exhibit all the core features that Swain and Johnson (1997) discuss.

There are a number of characteristics of immersion programmes as they occur in North America and Australia, that need to be noted. In Canada, for example, both L1 and the L2 are prestigious languages and therefore likely to lead to additive bilingualism. The programme is optional. Parents make a choice to send their children to such schools and are therefore willing to provide support to their children in their learning. The teachers are bilingual; they use only the second language in the classroom but can understand the students if (in the early stages) they respond in the first language. And very importantly, all students begin their immersion in the L2 at the same level of proficiency or lack of it.

Most SP countries run an immersion type of programme, some officially beginning from Grade 4 as in Fiji, others from Grade 7 as in Tonga and Samoa. However, as mentioned earlier, unlike standard immersion programmes elsewhere, the L1 frequently continues to be used as a medium of instruction alongside the L2 medium. Another difference between the programmes in SP countries and immersion in countries like Canada, the USA and Australia is that in the latter countries a proportion of the school curriculum is also taught in the students' L1. It is the relatively reduced use of the mother tongue in schools in the SP countries that makes the SP immersion different from immersion in some

other countries. In addition, when there is a switch to English (or French) as the medium of instruction, there is no choice for the students. They cannot opt out of the bilingual programme and undertake a programme in their L1.

Implications for SP countries

- *Educational authorities:* One of the major issues that educational authorities would have to address initially is which of the school subjects would continue to be taught in the mother tongue? Subjects such as social science, physical training, arts, home science could easily be taught and assessed in the L1 in many of the SP countries with a comparatively low investment of time and money.²
- *Schools:* Depending upon which model is chosen, the early, delayed or late, there may be a need to have bilingual teachers. If the teaching force is largely indigenous this may be a minor hurdle. Schools would also need to create an atmosphere of bilingualism and biculturalism by officially using both languages in their school operation.
- *Teachers:* One of the implications of immersion type teaching is the use of immersion types of strategies in order to make ideas and concepts comprehensible. These strategies are regarded as contributing to the success of immersion programmes. Such strategies are, in fact, good teaching strategies that take into account that language mediates concepts and ideas. Underlying content-based teaching is the assumption that students will learn the second language through making sense of the language input provided by teachers and instructional and other materials to which students are exposed. Teachers, therefore, have to avoid the temptation of constant translation from English/French to the L1. This, in turn, presupposes high levels of second language proficiency amongst the teachers.
- *Students:* Students need to achieve an understanding that every subject class is also a language-learning class, so that second language learning, for example English, does not only occur in the lesson that is timetabled as English.
- *Programme materials:* Instructional materials should be as comprehensible to students as possible, or at least capable of being made comprehensible by the intervention of the teacher. Language should not get in the way of understanding the content matter. When ideas are not fully comprehended there is a danger of rote learning without the necessary understanding that should also exist. Many SP countries have developed materials in L2 for use by teachers in class. They are, no doubt, more comprehensible to students than if they were to use materials developed in metropolitan countries for use by native speakers. Also, further materials for teaching in the vernacular, reflecting sound pedagogical principles, would need to be developed.

Maintenance heritage/community languages programmes

The heritage or community languages programmes tend to vary from country to country and indeed from one context to another. One of their aims is to help a minority language community maintain its language. Such a language may be used as a medium of instruction for all, or part of, a school day, but unlike transitional programmes, the goal is not to facilitate transition to the majority language

but to give the speakers of this language an opportunity to retain and use the language. Such programmes are to be found in a number of countries: Maori in New Zealand (Benton, 1986; Spolsky, 1990), some community languages in Australia (Clyne, 1991), a variety of languages in the USA (Fishman, 1989), and in Canada, which uses the term 'heritage language' (Cummins, 1992). Variations on using the heritage or community languages as medium of instruction are programmes that are conducted after school hours during the week or in the weekends with the focus on language and culture. The primary purpose of these programmes is to help maintain the minority language. To use this term in the South Pacific context, one needs to broaden the definition of heritage languages to include cases in the South Pacific where the language situation is different but the goals might be similar: to retain the use of one's L1.

Implications for SP countries

This type of programme is most relevant to the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. However, there are considerable constraints regarding the number of languages that can be catered for in this way.

There is, however, an innovative programme that has operated successfully in Papua New Guinea for some time that could act as a guide to the other two multilingual countries. The *Viles Tok Ples Skul*, the village vernacular school, which was later renamed *Tok Ples Pri Skul*, the vernacular pre-school, has been in operation for almost 20 years. It is a remarkable programme in a number of ways, including the fact that it arose out of the initiative of the people themselves. The schools teach literacy and numeracy in the local language – the Tok Ples. These programmes have been evaluated for their educational, social and cultural benefits. Observation and interview data suggest that children who have gone through these schools are more alert, quicker to follow teachers' directions, more confident speakers in the classroom, and better at reading in English. In comparison with children who have not been to these schools, the *Tok Ples Skul* children are better prepared to acquire literacy, suggesting that children tend to learn reading-related skills better if they are acquired in a language with which they are already familiar. Evaluation of the social and cultural benefits of these schools shows that students are better integrated into the village life, adjust more quickly to the primary school, and show better language skills in their mother tongue (Siegel, 1997a). The advantages of such schools seem to be manifold, as this quotation suggests:

Communities are not just attracted to the concept because of improved academic performance on the part of the students, nor because of improved behaviour and interaction of students in community schools classes, but also because the programme is seen as building strong relationships and links with the language, culture and values of the home community
(from *Survey of Vernacular Education Programming at the Provincial Level Within Papua New Guinea* (SIL), quoted in Siegel (1997a: 211))

The educational reforms in Papua New Guinea in the 1990s have changed the character of these programmes. While such programmes began as 'pre-school' programmes, the 1990s reform of primary education has divided primary education into 'elementary' schools made up of the preparatory year and Grades 1 and

2, and 'primary' comprising Grades 3–8. The Tok Ples can be used at the elementary level, and English is used for Grades 3–8 (Siegel, 1997a).

What are the implications of such an innovation for the formal school sector?

- *Educational authorities:* One of the features of the *Tok Ples Pri Skul* has been that it is a grassroots initiative and its success can be partly attributed to the enthusiastic support of the villagers themselves. They have a stake in the school and in the education of their children; it is not controlled by a centralised body, the Department of Education located in the capital city, which makes similar or uniform decisions about schools in a whole range of different locations, circumstances, and languages. If people involvement is an element contributing to success, then the challenge for the central government is to encourage this initiative occurring on a larger scale without it taking control over these developments. Working in partnership with local people who have the final say is a good model. The educational authorities can assist by providing exemplars from successful programmes.

In multilingual Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, where some languages do not have a sufficient number of speakers to make them economically viable, there may be few options available except to leave the early stages of education in the hands of the people themselves, undertaken of their own volition.

- *Schools, teachers and students:* This will vary from place to place as the people in a particular locality exercise control.
- *Programme materials:* Each community that wants to develop such schools would need to develop its own materials. A necessary prerequisite for this would be for the local language to have an orthography.

Some Models of Language-in-education for SP Countries

In this section of the paper a number of different models of language-in-education for primary schools are suggested. They take into account the different language realities in the countries of the South Pacific. There will be one model for countries that have one predominant L1 for most of the population, two models for the multilingual countries, and three models for Fiji where the language situation is different from the other SP countries.

The models that are suggested have drawn primarily upon transitional bilingual programme Type II, though they can also be seen as drawing upon a modified form of immersion model. The important consideration is that the SP context may require a hybrid that draws upon the positive elements of a number of different models of bilingual education that are used around the world.

Proposed model for SP countries that have one predominant L1

As a preamble, it seems that one of the issues countries with one predominant L1 have to resolve is the extent to which the L1 is to be developed to fulfil as wide a role in the society as possible. Many small island states are unlikely to be able to produce sufficient materials in L1 for higher grade levels. Also in a country like the Cook Islands, there is a greater movement of the population to and from New Zealand suggesting that English has to be taught also (as is the case at the

Table 2 How the L1 and English might be apportioned over the primary years

| <i>Grade</i> | <i>L1 (mother tongue)</i> | <i>L2 (English)</i> |
|--------------|--|---|
| Pre-school | 100% language of instruction Pre-literacy activities | Songs and nursery rhymes only |
| Grade 1 | Language of instruction Development of literacy | Introduction to oral English Songs and nursery rhymes |
| Grade 2 | Language of instruction Consolidation of reading and writing | Introduction to literacy in English Book-based and oral instruction |
| Grade 3 | Language of instruction L1 as a subject | English as a subject |
| Grade 4 | Language of instruction for some subjects L1 as a subject 80% used for instruction | Language of instruction for some subjects Continue English language as subject 20% used for instruction |
| Grade 5 | Language of instruction 50% | Language of instruction 50% |
| Grade 6 | Language of instruction 40% | Language of instruction 60% |

moment). One of the goals of the education systems in the SP countries would be to produce bilingual citizens. It can be assumed therefore that SP countries with one predominant L1 will continue to want to teach English or French and the policy question revolves around this issue: how can SP countries structure their language-in-education policy so that the school system produces people comfortable in the use of two (or more) languages, albeit in specified domains?

Based on the assumptions in the previous paragraph, Table 2 suggests the mix of languages that might be used at the primary level as medium of instruction. It should be noted that similar, though less clearly articulated, policies operate, for example, in Tonga and Samoa at the present time, though in both cases the official switch to English medium does not occur until Grade 7. This language-in-education policy is predicated on a greater use of L1 and a gradual introduction of a L2 (English) and a graduated use of L1 and L2 as media of instruction. For this policy to be successful, good literacy resources for both L1 and L2 are needed, as are teachers who are well trained in literacy development.

At pre-school no attempt should be made to *formally* teach any English but teaching some nursery rhymes and songs may attune children's ears to the English language.

At Grade 1, reading is taught in L1. To foster the incipient literacy it is necessary that students have reading material other than set textbooks in the L1 available to them. There are a number of strategies for doing this, from handcrafted books to using the laser printer to run off copies. It is suggested that some oral English be introduced at this level but this does not necessarily have to be done in the way that the former structurally based English-language course was conducted in classes. The approach should be more communicative and a greater use of children's stories in English can be made.

At Grade 2, literacy skills in L1 are developed further. To do this, there have to be materials available for reading. Regular writing in the L1 should also occur. At this grade, reading in L2 is also introduced but it may be advisable not to stipulate that it should begin for all classes at the beginning of the school year. Grade 2 teachers assess how well children can read in their first language. If they are struggling to read in the L1, introduction to reading in L2 is likely to confuse them further. As children begin to read in English, the English-language programme can be both book-based as well as oral.

At Grade 4 it is suggested that the language of instruction be apportioned between the two languages. Most of it should still be in L1 but having some in the L2 begins to provide students with a greater exposure to the second language. An extensive reading programme should be encouraged in L2 to improve the proficiency in this language along the lines of the Book Flood Project carried out in Fiji (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983).

At Grades 5 and 6 the percentages are notional. It may be that some SP countries may decide that teachers in the upper primary system do not have a high proficiency in the English language and would therefore not be able to conduct their classes efficiently in that language. If there is concern about the proficiency of the teachers in L2, it will need to be addressed because the desired bilingual outcomes need teachers to be proficient in the L2.

Before I briefly address the issue of what might happen after Grade 6, I would like to reiterate that in order for students to be literate in their L1 it is necessary that they be provided ample and frequent opportunities to practise their literacy skills on the grounds that such skills will transfer to L2 literacy (Cummins, 1991). In the past, there has been a tendency to think that because it is the children's L1, they do not need as much practice as they would for a L2. The effect of extensive reading upon the development of knowledge base and (perhaps) critical thinking, as well as language development, especially for second-language learners, is well documented (see Day & Bamford, 1998; Krashen, 1993 for a discussion on extensive reading).

With regard to teaching in the second language, immersion teaching principles should be encouraged. At the heart of these principles is the requirement that the language input provided by the teacher should be comprehensible, or made comprehensible by the use of such teaching strategies as rephrasing or reformulating (especially when new ideas are being presented), modelling or demonstrating the meaning, using mime, concrete examples or visual aids.

Should these dual modes of instruction continue into the lower secondary? To show that one values the L1, subjects that relate more to social and cultural life of the country can be continued to be taught and examined in the L1. Certainly the L1 should continue to be taught as a subject to the highest levels of secondary school and students encouraged to use it creatively.

Proposed model(s) for multilingual countries: Vanuatu and Solomon Islands

In this section, two models will be presented because of the large number of languages in these countries and the existence of a lingua franca. Countries with a multiplicity of languages reflecting tribal or regional differences have difficult decisions to make regarding language or languages to be used in education. In

many ex-colonial countries in Africa, for example, the decision has been made to use English or French (or another metropolitan language) as the medium of instruction from the very beginning or very early years of primary school, in order to avoid domestic problems over the issue of one language being favoured over others (see, for example, Akinnaso, 1993 for a discussion of reasons for and against mother-tongue education in the Nigerian context).

Model 1: Based on Tok Ples Pri Skul experiences in Papua New Guinea

As mentioned earlier in the paper, this model of bilingual education seems to have served children in Papua New Guinea well and could be a model for education in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. However, the situation is not simple in all cases and where the community does not take the initiative to develop *Tok Ples Pri Skuls* (TPPS) or the language situation does not lend itself to the use of a Tok Ples then the Government may wish to pursue Model 2 described below.

There are a number of issues that need to be resolved. Are TPPS students to continue to have an opportunity to study their Tok Ples in the early years of the primary or is there to be a rapid change to English (French) or Pijin/Bislama as the medium of instruction. The answer to this question, with its substantial resource implications, would need to be addressed, either by the central government, or the community, or both.

Once students begin to be instructed only in the English (French) language we have a *de facto* immersion type of situation and immersion type strategies for teaching should be used in order to ensure that students understand the content that is being taught. The use of these strategies, however, requires higher levels of proficiency in the English or French language.

Model 2: The use of Pijin/Bislama as the language of initial instruction

Suggestions about the use of Pijin and Bislama have been made previously on numerous occasions (Crowley & Lynch, 1985; *Report of the Vanuatu Language Planning Conference 1991*) but have been rejected on one or more of these grounds: that a pidgin (or creole) is not a full language, or it is a waste of time learning a pidgin when the goal is to learn the standard language, or that learning a pidgin or creole hinders the acquisition of the standard language because of their closeness to each other, at least lexically. The first argument can be dismissed as no linguist thinks a pidgin or creole, especially a creole, is so degenerate that it cannot develop into a fully-fledged language performing all the functions which are required of it.³ The second objection can be answered by the many studies, including those in Papua New Guinea, which show that learning initially through Tok Pisin does have a positive effect upon the subsequent learning of English (Siegel, 1997b).

Bislama is a national language, and so is Pijin, *de facto* if not *de jure*. Each is a resource used in the society for personal interactions, over radio, in newspapers and so forth but is not mandated for use in the formal classroom.

Ideally, this model needs to be combined with the first model described above. In those situations where the community would like to begin their children's education in the local language they should be encouraged to do so, along the lines of the TPPS. Where the local situation suggests that education should begin in Pijin/Bislama it should begin in that language. If option TPPS is chosen then model 1 can be followed. If Pijin/Bislama is used – and this is to become a

national language – then the model outlined for largely monolingual countries can be followed so that students become bilingual in a Pijin/Bislama and English/French.

The case of Fiji

Fiji has been treated differently because it is, unlike the countries in the eastern part of the South Pacific, not monolingual. It is also different from the countries in the western part of the Pacific because it does not have numerous languages. Admittedly, while the Bauan dialect has become dominant and is regarded as the standard Fijian, there are a number of dialects, some with marked differences (Geraghty, 1984). In effect, there are Fijian children who come into Grade 1 with their own dialect and have to learn the standard Fijian as a second dialect, before learning English as a second language.

Similarly, the other predominant language, Fiji Hindi, spoken by the people of Indian background, is different from the Standard Hindi. Children from this background are introduced to standard Hindi as a second dialect (or in cases of Tamil, Punjabi or Gujerati as a second language albeit a lingua franca), before learning English as a second language. In Fiji, most indigenous children begin their education in their L1 (or a dialectal variation); many Indo-Fijian children begin their formal education in Standard Hindi (which is different from Fiji Hindi and which is certainly quite different for speakers of other Indian languages) for the first three years of primary school and then shift to English as the medium of instruction from Grade 4. This does not necessarily occur abruptly and both languages may be used as the medium of instruction for some period of time.

There are, however, a few primary schools which use English as the medium of instruction from Grade 1. They tend to be located in the urban areas and draw students from all races in Fiji so that English acts as the lingua franca. These children, generally, do have some understanding of English prior to commencing Grade 1 because of the exposure they receive before going to school or, in some cases, may actually have a local dialect of English as their first language. There is, therefore, a sizeable proportion of children in the urban area who do understand English to varying degrees before they enter a primary school.

This particular mix of languages – and a couple that have not been mentioned – suggests that Fiji could have different options for different parts of the country. Such policies would need to be discussed with the communities that are affected by them and sufficient information provided to enable them to make more informed decisions.

Model 1 for those areas where children have only their L1 upon entering the formal school system

This is a situation that is akin to the one described under the model for countries with one L1 and therefore the model suggested under that section is applicable here. Such a model will obviously need to be 'sold' to parents who are initially likely to resist it on the grounds that their children might be disadvantaged in learning English. Suggestions made in the final section of the paper might provide a way for the Department of Education to proceed.

However, the situation in Fiji is a little more complex for both of the larger groups in Fiji: the Fijians and Indo-Fijians. To take the Fijian society first, a decision has to be made whether Standard Fijian or a dialect of Fijian spoken in that particular locality is to be used. If the latter then a subsequent decision is whether Standard Fijian is to be introduced and at what grade level. Such decisions would need to take into account the availability of teachers who speak the dialect. With regards to the Indo-Fijian society the decision is even more complex because of the number of different languages and the relative lack of availability of, for example, Gujerati teachers who could teach in the L1. The feasible choices with the Indo-Fijian society, except for possibly the Tamil-speaking population, is either Fiji Hindi or Standard Hindi, with the former more likely to be an L1 than the latter.

This brief discussion highlights the current complex language situation and the deliberate choices that have to be made if a more considered language-in-education policy is to be developed.

Model 2 for areas where children have as their L1 a dialect different from the standard L1 and where parents want their dialect used in schools

This is a situation that is akin to the one described in the section dealing with the *Tok Ples Pri Skul* system and therefore the pathways suggested under that model could be followed in this case. However, there is one crucial difference. They do not shift to English as the medium of instruction but rather shift to the use of standard Fijian or standard Hindi as the medium of instruction, and then at Grade 4 or 5 switch to the use of English. It has to be noted, however, that in many cases, the shift, orally, may not be to the standard dialect itself, determined in a large part by the L1 of the teachers themselves. Where teaching in a Fijian dialect can be sustained, the shift to standard Fijian might occur as late as Grade 3. In the case of children from the Indo-Fijian background, a decision would need to be made whether the initial shift is to Fiji-Hindi and then, at Grade 3, for example, a shift is made to Standard Hindi.

Table 3 Suggested uses of L1 and L2 in Fijian urban schools

| <i>Grade</i> | <i>L2 English</i> | <i>L1 (Fijian/Hindi/other)</i> |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Pre-school | 100% language of instruction Pre-literacy activities | Used for pragmatic reasons |
| Grade 1 | Language of instruction Development of literacy | Used for pragmatic reasons only |
| Grade 2 | Language of instruction Consolidation of reading and writing | Introduction to literacy in L1 Book-based and oral instruction |
| Grade 3 | Language of instruction L2 as a subject | L1 as a subject |
| Grade 4 onwards | Language of instruction L2 as a subject | L1 as a subject |

Model 3 for some urban schools

This model suggests that some urban schools follow a modified submersion model. It is modified because submersion programmes do not offer any instruction in L1. In this model, however, a considerably lesser role is suggested for L1 on the grounds that the school population is likely to consist of speakers of a number of different languages. A possible operation of this model is given in Table 3.

Some Issues Related to Policy Development and its Implementation

Innovations in education are often begun with great fanfare but the eventual outcomes do not always match the initial projections. Using a framework suggested by Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991), Mangubhai (1997) has attempted to explain why a second language innovation in Fiji and another in Australia were not totally successful. For any educational innovation to be effective and sustainable it needs to be built upon the current contextual conditions, the milieu in which the innovation is to be inserted. It needs to take as its point of departure the current situation as it relates to curriculum, resources, teacher competencies, educational infrastructure and so forth. These facets of the educational system need to be critically evaluated at the time that an innovation is being considered so that a proper understanding about the *whole* educational system at that particular point in time is possible. This information, in turn, will assist in determining whether the proposed innovation is likely to achieve the goals that have been formulated.

To be able to discuss sensibly the possible effects of an innovation, it is necessary to understand the dynamics of change (Fullan, 1993). Planners of educational changes in the SP countries may find it useful if the types of questions posed by Fullan are addressed in their planning processes, and the lessons learnt about educational changes kept in mind.

Concluding Remarks and a Way Forward

After a brief mention of mechanisms of change and its dynamic nature, it seems a fitting conclusion to this paper to suggest how SP countries might wish to take this debate about language-in-education, especially the language of instruction in primary schools, forward. Any change in this area will have significant impact at all levels of education and therefore the change has to be rooted in the broader picture. Sometimes the ramifications of change appear overwhelming (and costly) and policy makers shy away from it, maintaining the status quo. Taking this very real concern into account, it is suggested that any changes in language-in-education policy should occur gradually. The SP countries might consider setting up pilot schools in which the innovation is tried out and evaluated. Such evaluation is a very important part of the innovation because the data would provide information about those aspects of the innovation that are working and those which need changes. The setting up of these pilot schools will require dialogue with the community, covering at least the purposes for this innovation and the advantages that might accrue to their children. The pilot schools should be set up in a number of different regions of a country to

reflect the differences in locale: urban and rural; major island and isolated island and so on. Data from the evaluation could be used for fine-tuning the programme(s), reassuring parents, and providing a platform for debate and discussion for the expansion of the innovation into other schools.

The setting up of pilot schools has a number of advantages:

- it limits the resources – human and material – that have to be used;
- it makes the teacher training or in-service training manageable;
- it makes the production of materials more manageable;
- it is easier to monitor a smaller number of schools involved in the new programme;
- it makes the task of evaluation a little easier;
- it offers flexibility to the SP countries in terms of the number of schools that might be involved in the new programme.

No doubt there will be other factors that educationists in the SP countries will be able to suggest that reflect the particularities of their own situation. The concept of pilot schools permits the incorporation of particular circumstances in the way they might operate. It seems that it offers the best chance for SP countries to consider some innovations at the very dawn of a new century.

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Notes

1. In fact, it could be argued that Pijin and Bislama are no longer 'pidgins' in the technical sense but rather expanded pidgins (for most of the population) and creoles for a growing number of children in the more urban areas.
2. Such choices of subjects can send unintended messages about the status of the two languages, but this is not the paper in which to discuss this.
3. The recent death of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania brings to mind that while he may not have been successful in developing his country economically he certainly was able to do something about health and education. His promotion of Kiswahili as Tanzania's national language helped break down tribal divisions. It may be that the promotion of Pijin and Bislama could do the same for the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

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