Bibliographical references


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This book focuses on the analysis of interviews with fourteen former students of a French-Occitan immersion elementary school. The researchers’ objective was to assess the degree of success or failure of this particular type of school, that adopted the Freinet method of teaching, and of the immersion bilingual education in a minority language, Occitan, in general. Occitan is in danger of disappearing, and has no longer been transmitted in the family contexts since the 1950s.

Approximately one half of the book consists of the transcribed oral interviews (corpus), allowing the reader to better follow the authors’commentaries, and to form his or her own opinion. Three different perspectives on the single study are presented. First, Boyer and Alén Garabato focus on the sociolinguistic parameters in this particular language contact situation based on their conversations with the subjects. Their analysis introduces a contextualized approach to the issue of language representation, a focus borne out of sociology and social psychology. Second, Baccou, a teacher at the school, briefly comments on his experience. Finally, Rouquette analyzes the results from a psycho-sociologic perspective. This last part is particularly interesting since the results contradict the following commonly accepted notions:
(1) early bilingual education facilitates the subsequent study of foreign languages (e.g. Cenoz & Valencia, 1994; Sanz, 2000; Swain, Lapkin, Rowen, & Hart, 1990);

(2) the mental representation of the two languages is altered by this particular teaching approach (Cummins, 1996);

(3) the explicit study of minority language provides students with a better long term mastery of that language (August & Hakuta, 1997; Greene, 1998).

Surprisingly, the results clearly indicated that early education in the minority language did not result in a better establishment of the minority language and did not decrease the presence of stereotypes usually linked to Occitan. The authors stress that the study was conducted with former students present at a school reunion, which may have led to a selection bias preventing a generalization of the study results. The authors further explain that the sample may have been predisposed towards subjects with a positive attitude towards the school and the language Occitan. Consequently a preponderance of a (merely) positive view on the school’s educational system and the use of Occitan could be expected. Indeed, the vast majority of answers suggested a generally positive attitude towards the school but they appeared to be strictly limited to romantic and nostalgic ideas. The fact that the students were enrolled in this school system did not alter their way of thinking about language or education. Nevertheless, the obtained results caution that the approach to immersion education alone does not necessarily lead to a normalization of that language. Reflecting the view of Cummins (1996) and Moll, Diaz, Estrada & Lopez (1992) who proposed that the language and literacy development of children in general is conditioned by experiences both inside and outside the classroom, the authors suggest that early bilingual education targeting the normalization of the minority language is more likely to fail when the use of the target language outside of school is not sufficiently supported. Further, they hypothesize that without a specific education pointing out the statutes and representations of languages, stereotypes are likely to remain unchanged.

In sum, the results of this experiment generate very relevant questions regarding the early bilingual education in a minority language. Although it is qualified as a preliminary study, the book provides stimulating insights into the research on the didactics of minority cultures and languages and offers rich interview material allowing for a better understanding of the process of language contact and language conflict.

Bibliographical references


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É xa un lugar común a referencia ó cambio de estatus que o galego experimentou nos últimos 25 anos, producándose unha complexa redistribución social do uso da lingua acompañada dunha reorientación da castelanización. Se tradicionalmente o grosa das interferencias afectaba ao nivel léxico, entre os novos falantes (tanto en idade como en uso) a fonética e a morfosintaxe parecen ser os eidos máis permeables.