

SFL410 – Language and Literacy Learning and Development.

Multilingualism

1. If people go to a country, they should assimilate to its ways and not expect special treatment.

According to Abudarham, most settlers to the UK and therefore I deduce other countries, specifically from the Asian subcontinent, want to assimilate to the ways and language of a country in which they settle. To this end it can be said that there could be no or little 'need' for 'special' treatment. Children go to mainstream educational establishments and learn alongside their peers and so become assimilated to a new country's ways by proxy.

However the parents of these children who do not have a new country's language have the ability and in most cases the 'want' to learn and adopt a new language. Kloss (1971) discusses the 'tacit compact' theory, which states that in migrating to a new country, immigrants enter into a, none verbal agreement to adopt their new abode's ways and therefore language. I feel this is an admirable thing to do and can only be encouraged, especially with the contribution added to a new country's economy by the new immigrant population; which alone in the UK is figured at £2.5bn per annum (<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4796488-110247,00.html>). To this end 'special treatment' can simply be seen as quid-pro-quo. Which although may not be 'expected' should still be given, Kloss (1971) also discusses this as what is called the 'take and give' theory.

2. Multilingualism is a valuable resource and minorities should be encouraged to maintain their language and culture.

Multilingualism can indeed be seen as a valuable tool to have in ones knowledge base. A person's identity is also something to be valued, and this itself can be hugely determined by their culture, language and background. For an individual therefore it is important to hold on to this identity and this in itself should be encouraged.

However, in Abudarham's, *Bilingualism and the Bilingual*, Kloss (1971) discusses amongst the four arguments controlling attitudes towards English and minority languages, the 'antighettoization'. This discusses the possibility that in holding onto ones language and culture a person or minority grouping can in fact, probably unintentionally create a divisive barrier to an indigenous population and therefore a 'sterile cultural ghetto'. This can lead to exclusion from what could be termed mainstream life leading to the very direct possibility of racism, prejudice and bigotry. As indeed has been a problem in the UK over many years, from minority members of a population who could be seen to fear what they do not know, or feel that another population is in turn attempting to foist their views, language and culture onto them. This idea is what Kloss (1971) terms the theory of 'national unity'. Stating that immigrant groups that perpetuate their language may easily become a politically disruptive force.

3. To have more than one language accepted in Britain would be divisive and might stop minority ethnic groups from getting on.

Kloss' (1971) 'national unity' theory, holds that "immigrant groups that perpetuate their language may easily become a politically disruptive force". And therefore goes on to say, "As a result, host countries have the *right* to require linguistic assimilation among immigrants". To this end it can be said that having more than one language in Britain could indeed be divisive. In fact Anthais' (1984) research showed that even Greek-Cypriot children experience racism due to speaking a different language even though the skin colour element most usually associated with racism is not present.

In many cities around the UK there can be found what may be termed 'ghettos' where minority groups of all skin colours tend to congregate and live together. Indeed in Birmingham, one of the most multicultural cities of the UK, there are areas such as Sparkhill and Lozells, which could be seen to the outsider as minority ghettos, segregated by racial and therefore linguistic boundaries. In my experience too it is true that there is a deal of racism between these minority groups themselves, let alone the population, which has generation upon generation of British born citizens.

Therefore it may well be seen that having multiple spoken languages could cause an unneeded further boundary to unity.

4. A community's language is best taught by the community itself – It's not for the state to interfere.

From Singhal's writing on Schemas (or schema) it could be said that a community's language could be 'easier' taught by a community itself. A schema is described by Winndowson (1983) as "cognitive constructs, which allow for the organisation of information in long term memory". For example methods in which a person can get information, such as strategies for spelling words, from simply being taught them to actually learning and remembering them, in which ever way best suits the individual. Therefore it may seem that being taught by someone from the same community who has had to learn a language themselves may be easier as the teacher may well have a better notion of what strategies work best for learning.

However this notion of what is 'easiest' in the teaching of a language is a different one from what is 'best'. It can be argued conversely that being taught by one from outside of ones own community can lead to a better understanding of a new community itself. For arguments sake if an Asian language speaker is taught English by a teacher who has themselves had to learn English as a second language there could well be gaps in the linguistics itself or inferred meanings could be misunderstood, such as idioms or similes.

Therefore, there is no reason why state 'interference' could not be welcomed in the teaching of a language to a community. And as previously stated with the amount of contribution to a new countries economy that many immigrant communities add, why indeed should this support not be given as a right?

5. Minority speakers pay their taxes like anyone else; why shouldn't they have services like library books, interpreters, teaching of community languages etc..?

In his 2005 speech to the Royal Institute, then home secretary Mr. David Blunkett stated that migrants to the UK contribute £2.5bn to the GDP of the UK. He went on to state that this migrant population, which make up a mere 8% of the UK's population, generate 10% of its wealth. To this end therefore it can be said that this population have every right to services such as library books, interpreters and teaching of community languages, as something they as a community have paid for.

However, the issue of bigotry once again rears its ugly head, when an indigenous population feels that interpreters and teaching of foreign languages are something they themselves are not needing and so therefore something that the state should not provide for others.

6. Providing services for minority speakers is impractical, expensive and hopelessly complicated.

As previously stated the migrant population of the UK contributes some £2.5bn per annum to the UK's economy so the issue of providing services being too expensive, can quite easily be argued against as something that is paid for so should be provided. This is again something mentioned in Kloss' (1971) 'take and give' theory.

However this provision may well be difficult to provide, complicated and some may say impractical, this does not mean that we as teachers should walk away from this obligation to provide the best possible forms or these services in our teaching. And to this end a government or state is rightly obliged to provide adequate services for minority speakers also.

Conclusion

In conclusion there are the four theories of why people should give up their own languages or dialects as clearly identified by Kloss (1971). These being, the tacit concept theory, the take and give theory, the antighettoization theory and the national unity theory. These in themselves give a strong argument to those opposed to migrants speaking their first languages in a new country.

However from a more personable perspective it can be argued that by asking or even forcing an immigrant to adopt a new language as their 'mother tongue' and even go as far as denouncing their original tongue and culture is a bridge too far and is in fact denying their entire identity as a human being. Everyone has a right to his or her own identity and we as teacher must accept and even embrace this. It is our jobs as teachers to understand this in our learners and in doing so we can embrace new languages ourselves, which will hopefully lead to us being better equipped to teach the English language.

If we as teachers understand the formation of other languages and ourselves become more multilingual then through this we will hopefully be able to see and learn new best practises and strategies for the teaching of English Language.

We must also expel the common myth that simply because a student doesn't appear to understand English language teaching that they are unintelligent. Indeed, "He that understands grammar in one language, understands it in another as far as the essential properties of Grammar are concerned. The fact that he can't speak, nor comprehend, another language is due to the diversity of words and their various forms, but these are the accidental properties of grammar."

Roger Bacon (1214-1294)

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