

The Impact of Bilingual Education on Indigenous Language and Culture: The case of Tapirape

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1. Introduction

Numerous studies indicate that many indigenous languages around the world are headed for extinction and will disappear within the next century (Krauss, 1992; Hale, 1992; Nettle & Romaine, 2000). To preserve and revive these languages, both indigenous people and researchers (e.g. Krauss, 1992, Hinton, 2001) acknowledge that bilingual schools are an important resource for increasing the chances of language survival. However, many such 'bilingual' schools have been ineffective due to the pressure imposed by the dominant languages, which causes many of these schools to neglect the indigenous languages. Nevertheless, there are some bilingual schools that have been teaching both indigenous and dominant languages effectively — Tapirape (central Brazil) is a case in point. The Tapirape school can be considered a successful example of an indigenous school for several reasons. Its curriculum takes into account the indigenous culture, all teachers are natives, the primary language of instruction is Tapirape, and, in addition, it includes a strong program of teaching Portuguese as second language, which develops the indigenous students' ability to communicate satisfactorily in the dominant non-indigenous language as well. Despite the effective bilingual instruction, however, Tapirape teachers and leaders have argued that the school has changed the Tapirape lifestyle in negative as well as positive ways.

This study addresses the effects of bilingual schooling on the Tapirape language and culture. This discussion is based on participant observation from audio-recorded

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interviews in which teachers and leaders discuss their bilingual school and its consequences for the Tapirape people. The study demonstrates that even an effective bilingual school may introduce considerable complexities for an indigenous community, which may have a direct impact on cultural and linguistic maintenance. While no simple solutions are at hand, we propose that a continuous evaluation and on-going reconstruction of aspects of the school, directed by the community, is an essential part of assessing and reducing these concerns.

2. Endangered languages and bilingual schools as a resource for increasing the chances of language survival

An ongoing discussion about endangered languages and strategies for their revival and maintenance has been taking place in recent years, particularly in the field of linguistics. Various ways to preserve and maintain those endangered languages have been suggested. We will focus on one of them – educational programs. Krauss (1992) suggests that, for languages that are still learned by children, a significant part of the maintenance effort should be undertaken in school. Educational programs make an important contribution to reestablishing pride in the indigenous language and culture by including components of the native language and culture in their curriculum. Working educationally, culturally and politically increases the chances of these languages' survival. It means involving communities in this work, as well as researchers and the government, in order to produce pedagogical materials and literature to promote the use of these languages; it is also necessary that governments support language planning in these communities and create conditions to encourage the use of these languages. Similarly, Hinton (2001) argues that there are different steps that can promote language revitalization, depending on the kind of language loss, and most of those steps involve educational programs. In some cases, it is necessary to develop new pedagogical programs such as constructing a bilingual program directed toward second language learning for adults as well as developing intensive courses for children, with components in the school, using the endangered language as the language of instruction. Hinton identifies three types of school-based programs for language revitalization, which vary in goals, limitations and results: 1. the full-scale immersion program, 2. teaching an endangered language as a second language, and 3. the bilingual education program. The third – the focus of this paper – can, as the author points out, help to shape new domains of use for the endangered language, since its use as an instructional language can result in true balanced bilingualism. However, one disadvantage is that bilingual education depends on good funding and governmental support to maintain schools and train teachers. Successful examples of school-based programs include the endangered second language program in public schools in Humboldt County, California, where Tolowa, Hupa, Karuk and Yoruk are taught as second languages, and the immersion programs that have resulted in a whole generation of new speakers of Maori and Hawaiian languages (Hinton, 2001)

Despite these examples of successful educational programs, many others have failed in their goals. In Julca-Guerrero's (2000) study of bilingual schools in Peruvian Quechua communities, he observes that effective bilingual teaching does not occur due to the asymmetric relationship between Quechua language and Spanish, since the indigenous language is not taught effectively. Many factors contribute to this failure. First, pressured

by international politics, the Peruvian government has simply imposed the bilingual school on indigenous people without engaging in a discussion with the communities involved in the process. These schools do not take into account the indigenous culture and in many cases have simply been a means for the government to obtain funds from international agencies. Furthermore, politicians do not tend to promote the use of indigenous languages, so financial investments in bilingual schools are often not made. One consequence of this situation is that Quechua teachers are not prepared to teach in the native language, since many do not have confidence in the idea of bilingual education, and most lack training. There is also little written material in which Quechua instruction can be carried out; teachers are not trained or encouraged to create these, and there are no funds to pay professionals to do so. Moreover, instruction in Quechua is restricted to two hours a week or less, so that Spanish assumes the position of the instructional language, thus enforcing the asymmetry between Spanish and Quechua. Finally, there is a common belief in the Quechua communities, encouraged by the majority society, that Spanish is the best language and, in addition, enables economic ascension. All these factors reported by Julca-Guerrero contribute to unsuccessful bilingual schools, since these schools do not promote the minority language.

Such problems are not restricted to bilingual schools in Peruvian Quechua communities. According to Hilaria Cruz (2008, personal communication), Chatino communities from Southern Mexico have similar problems as those experienced in Peru: lack of government support, low community confidence that their language is suitable for the school, and professionals who are unprepared to teach or to prepare materials in the indigenous language. Similarly, in the United States, Watahomigie and Yamamoto's (1992) description of the Hualapai Bilingual/Bicultural Education Program of Peach Springs, Arizona shows that while a successful bilingual program may ultimately be possible, reaching this goal is slow and difficult work. At the beginning of the Hualapai program, for example, the language of instruction in schools was English, and all students left school speaking English but not Hualapai. The idea was prevalent that indigenous languages are not complex languages and could not be taught in school. The researchers and the community leaders, interested in promoting Hualapai, had to fight against this point of view, and, now, after decades of work, the Hualapai community has an effective bilingual school, which encourages and promotes the use of both the indigenous and the non-indigenous language. All of these testimonies indicate that is not so easy to construct a successful educational program for minority languages.

In Brazil, bilingual education programs share some similarities with the programs cited above. Many were originally imposed by missionaries (Catholic or Protestant SIL), e.g., the Xavante, Bororo and Karaja schools (central Brazil) and the Kaingang schools (southern Brazil), to cite a few (Silva, 1998; D'Angelis, 2003). The main goal of these schools was to convert indigenous children to Christianity and/or to foster the translation and reading of the Bible in the indigenous language; in some cases indigenous children were separated from their parents and interned in a mission school to receive both schooling and Christian doctrine. The indigenous language was used only as a language of transition to Portuguese. In addition, the model for the indigenous schools was drawn directly from non-indigenous Brazilian schools, with the result that these indigenous schools have not taken the indigenous culture and social patterns into account. Since these

schools were not in fact constructed to attend to the needs of the indigenous communities, indigenous students typically leave them with no skills in reading and writing in either the indigenous language or Portuguese, even today in some cases. Currently, although there are still many missionaries trying to persuade indigenous people to abandon their religion and culture and convert to Christianity, the most culturally insensitive mission schools have become largely extinct, and many indigenous peoples have undertaken efforts to construct schools that work effectively for them. In this process of construction, however, there are many obstacles and problems similar to those discussed above. Supported by Brazilian laws (particularly the Constitution of Brazil, 1988) which recognize indigenous peoples' right to speak their languages and express their culture, there is an effort to reshape these schools to be both compatible with the indigenous culture and to help indigenous people deal with the non-indigenous world. However, in spite of modern Brazilian law, the Brazilian Government has failed to financially support the indigenous schools or to construct linguistics policies that promote indigenous rights.

Although many Brazilian indigenous communities have experienced these problems in constructing and maintaining viable schools, there are nevertheless some indigenous communities that have been more successful. Some of the best examples are the Tuyuka school (northwest Brazil) and the Myky and Tapirape schools (central Brazil). These schools have adopted a bilingual/bicultural curriculum, and their educational programs are structured according to the linguistic and cultural needs of the communities. Subjects such as native agricultural practices and traditional handicrafts are part of a curriculum in which the indigenous language is the language of instruction, and Portuguese is taught as second language. In this paper, we focus on one of these communities – the Tapirape.

3. The Tapirape people and their bilingual school

The Tapirape people live in Mato Grosso, central Brazil. They number about 670 individuals, who live in several small villages (Akara'ytawa, Xapi'iekeatawa, Wiriaotawa, Majtyritawa, and the main village Tapi'itawa) in two protected areas or reservations (Urubu Branco and Tapirape-Karaja). They speak Tapirape (of the Tupi-guarani family) as their mother tongue.

The history of the Tapirape school begins with the Tapirape's fight for their traditional lands. In the late 1960s, the Tapirape lands were being invaded and deforested by non-indigenous people. To prove that they were owners of the indigenous land, the invaders produced maps and documents written in Portuguese. Up until this time, the Tapirape had not been interested in having a school. After the invasion, however, they felt that the school could be useful for them in that it could help them understand the Portuguese and the maps used by the invaders. They directed their request for a school to some Catholic missionaries – the “Little Sisters of Jesus” - who had living with them since 1952. These missionaries sent the Tapirape request on to a secular couple, both teachers. This couple then came to live in the village in order to help the Tapirape found a school and to construct a curriculum for them. This curriculum was based on the Paulo Freire's pedagogy, an approach to schooling founded by Freire (1967, 1968), that stresses compatibility with the local culture. At first, only adults attended classes, with the goal of

preparing Tapirape leaders to deal with the invaders as quickly as possible. Currently, however, the school includes both elementary and high school levels. The language of instruction is Tapirape, all teachers are Tapirape, and there are specific schedules for classes in Tapirape and in Portuguese as a second language. Students leave school competent in reading and writing both Tapirape and Portuguese (Dias de Paula, 2000). Since 2006, roughly half of the Tapirape students who have applied to attend Brazilian universities have been accepted after passing Portuguese proficiency exams.

If we compare the Tapirape school with other, less successful indigenous schools in Brazil, we can identify specific factors that contribute to the Tapirape success. First, the school was originally requested by the Tapirape people, rather than being initiated by non-governmental organizations or imposed by missionaries, as was the case for the Xavante and others cited above. The Tapirape school is thus not associated with the cultural violence of missionaries. Although its founding was related to the struggle over land, we can assume that school has a political and symbolic significance for the Tapirape, since the fight for traditional lands has meant the fight for Tapirape survival. Second, the respectful attitudes of the school's non-Tapirape founders have been an essential part of its development. These founders worked 'with' the Tapirape rather than 'for' them; they listened to the views and wishes of the Tapirape, and they respected the indigenous sense of time – requiring long deliberation for all decisions - and the choices made by the Tapirape, even when these decisions were contrary to the founders' own points of view. Currently, too, each decision regarding the school is discussed by the Tapirape community in meetings that can take up to several days. The community decides who should be the teachers, who should be the director, how to organize the school budget, where the school should be built, what kind of calendar the school should have, and virtually every other issue relating to the school. An important example of the founders' respect for Tapirape wishes is the following. As mentioned above, the curriculum was first conceived with the reality of Tapirape life and culture in mind. In order to include Tapirape community activities – with the assumption that these are also part of the students' education – the curriculum was originally designed to be quite flexible in order to allow students to spend more time with their families. In the beginning, for example, classes were not held every day. Although this seemed to be the best way to respect, promote and maintain indigenous life, in the 1980s, the Tapirape community – pressured by the policies and negative evaluations of the surrounding non-indigenous society – asked the founders of the school for a strict, daily schedule. After a profound discussion within the community (Eunice Dias de Paula and Little Sisters of Jesus, 1999, p. c.), the school changed its schedule; since then classes have been held every day and at specific hours, as in the non-indigenous schools.

Although Tapirape bilingual education could be considered very successful, since the community has been in charge of the school and the students have demonstrated competence in both the indigenous language and Portuguese, many leaders and other persons from the community are conscious of the changes the school has brought to the indigenous lifestyle. We will present their evaluation of these issues below, and discuss how schools can impact culture and language in indigenous communities. The data we analyze are excerpts (collected in August 2006) from recorded interviews with teachers and leaders representing all the Tapirape villages. In these interviews, 11 teachers and

leaders (9 men and 2 women, 30-55 years old) discuss their school and explain their expectations and concerns about it. The interviewees are highly involved in community life and serve important roles in their villages; their opinions largely reflect those of the Tapirape community in general.

3.1 Positive Aspects of the Tapirape Bilingual School

This section presents the excerpts in which interviewees point out how the Tapirape school program has been successful in helping the Tapirape people. According to interviewees, the school has contributed to the autonomy of the Tapirape vis-a-vis Brazilian national culture. The Tapirape people are now better able to fight for their rights without the assistance of non-indigenous agencies because they have become familiar with the non-indigenous language (Portuguese) and culture through their bilingual school. In addition, the school has helped them to maintain their own language and culture through instruction in the Tapirape language, as well as in native craftsmanship and agricultural practices. The first extract depicts the school as an important achievement for the Tapirape people, since it has helped them to learn the non-indigenous language and understand Brazilian culture as well as maintain the indigenous culture and language:

- (1) In my personal opinion, the Tapirape school is a kind of conquest. Our school has helped us to know things that we didn't know before. It has taught non-indigenous knowledge and our culture too and made it stronger. (Korira'i Tapirape, 08.19.06, male Portuguese language teacher, Akara'ytawa village vice-chief)

The speaker points out that the school allows the Tapirape to "know things that we didn't know before" - such as Portuguese and the use of maps. In addition, a main goal of the school is to promote and maintain the indigenous language and culture, as the following three extracts illustrate:

- (2) The most important thing is teaching in our language. If we are teaching in our language, we will not lose our culture. (Makato Tapirape, 08.21.06, female Tapirape language teacher)
- (3) Positive points of the school are related to knowing our own culture and language. School really helps us in revitalizing our language and lifestyle, and in recording our culture. In addition, school is teaching us how non-indigenous people behave. It has helped us in the fight for our lands because we need to write documents in Portuguese for the Brazilian authorities. (Kamoriwa'i Tapirape, 08.22.06, male geography teacher and vice-chief of Tapi'itawa).

- (4) School is important for us because we are surrounded by non-indigenous people. So, the school is beneficial for us: it teaches writing and reading, and documents our language by keeping a written record of it. Before the school, we didn't keep a record of the Tapirape language. We kept it only in our minds, in our memories. Nowadays, we are producing materials in our language. Also, school helps us dialogue with non-indigenous people. We need to understand them just as we need to write documents in Portuguese. (Jeremy'i Tapirape, 08.23.06, male Tapirape language teacher)

Excerpts 2, 3 and 4 illustrate that knowledge about the non-indigenous culture and language is considered crucial in the fight for indigenous rights. Being surrounded by non-indigenous people was a determining factor in founding the school. In addition, as the interviewees argue, school created a new tool for Tapirape people – a way to record the language for future generations, as pointed out in (4). On one hand, the interviewee claims that indigenous people have their own ways to save and protect their languages. They do not need school to do it. On the other hand, the non-indigenous presence forces indigenous people to search for extra ways to protect themselves. In this case, the extra way is the school which provides an additional mechanism to store the language and culture. Clearly the school is not an indigenous artifact. It was imposed by the violence of the contact with non-indigenous people and it has been appropriated by the Tapirape people. This appropriation within the Tapirape community entails giving meaning to and creating functions for that 'foreign artifact'.

The process of appropriation of the school is related to indigenous autonomy as well. As excerpt 5 below expresses, another goal of the school is to improve and promote indigenous autonomy relative to non-indigenous people:

- (5) The young people are being prepared by the school. In the future, we will not need non-indigenous advisors anymore. We are improving our autonomy. In this way school is a kind of tool. (Inamoreo Tapirape, 08.23.06, male geography teacher)

Autonomy - the right of a community to govern itself and to organize its own activities - can be fostered by the school, although the process may be a long one. But because the school is a non-indigenous invention, it must be shaped and directed by the indigenous people in order to ensure that it does indeed promote their autonomy. The Tapirape people have been shaping their school from the beginning; however, full autonomy requires the training of young indigenous people to manage their school.

3.2 Negative Aspects of the Tapirape Bilingual School

Although Tapirape interviewees point out positive aspects of their school, most also recognize that the school has introduced profound changes to their lives, of which some are unanticipated and unwelcome. Some interviewees evaluate these changes as negative aspects of the school. One example is the amount of time that the school occupies in the students' daily lives, as described in excerpts 6 and 7:

- (6) Since the school's foundation, children have not been participating in traditional life. They do not go to the fields anymore and they don't have time to spend with their families. Nowadays, parents encourage their kids only to go to school. (Korira'i Tapirape, cited above)
- (7) Before the school, we used to go to the fields or to the river to fish and hunt with our children. Nowadays it is really difficult to do these kinds of things because children start school when they are 7 years old, and this does not allow them go out of the village with their parents. This is a negative aspect of school. (Kamoriwa'i, cited above)

According to these interviewees, the bilingual school has reduced the traditional spaces in which young people can learn about Tapirape culture. The students have less time to spend with their parents because they are required to go to school every day. Some of them do not learn how to cultivate traditional crops, and they receive less instruction according to traditional, hands-on Tapirape pedagogy, which is based on observation and repetition. When there was no school in the village, children used to learn in public spaces like the fields, the forest, the river beach or the family home, but this now occurs less frequently. The interviewees emphasize that there is an indigenous education that it is not associated with schooling. The school is not able to teach many of those skills that are acquired in a hands-on setting; only the time spent with the extended family provides the opportunity for apprenticeship. This time with the family also allows for the enrichment of native language usage and learning. Although school has been appropriated by the Tapirape people, many Tapirape feel that it is still a non-indigenous creation that should not usurp the traditional indigenous learning spaces.

The following passage emphasizes the ideas presented in excerpt 6 and 7 above and also adds that the school is stealing time not only from the children, but also from the adults who work in the school. According to this interviewee, teachers are spending a great deal of time in school, and do not have time to spend with their families or to cultivate traditional crops – implying poor use of Tapirape land:

- (8) School functions to teach non-indigenous culture, but not our culture. The school doesn't work well in this case: we have our land and nobody uses it. Teachers don't have time to cultivate the fields. Non-indigenous people are bullying us, saying we are lazy people. In addition, school doesn't allow children to fish or spend time with their parents. As far as non-indigenous culture is concerned school is good; we are learning about it. But our culture, it will be destroyed step-by-step, slowly. (Xywaeri Tapirape, 08.22.06, Tapi'itawa chief)

This interviewee points out a further impact of the school, relating to the non-indigenous evaluation of the way the Tapirape are using their land. It brings up a conflict experienced by many indigenous communities. On one hand, they are obliged to adopt a school – a non-indigenous artifact - and if they do not, they are labeled “uncivilized”. On the other hand, if the school occupies too much of the time needed for traditional activities, they are criticized for being lazy. This interviewee is also concerned about the

Tapirape culture and believes that it will be slowly lost. A related issue involves the maintenance of the native language, as illustrated by excerpt 9:

- (9) We have been mixing our language with Portuguese. We didn't use to do this but, nowadays, there are a lot of words that we don't have in our language. Children are hearing these words in Portuguese, in school and other places, and using them in the Tapirape language. (Jeremy'i Tapirape, cited above)

Despite the emphasis on teaching in Tapirape, Portuguese has gained prestige in the community. There has been an increase of code switching. Although this has not yet affected the vitality of the indigenous language, interviewees argue that it threatens their language, and they have identified the school as the culprit of this phenomenon. The interviewees are aware that their language is in conflict with a majority language and that school has an important role in controlling or not controlling the code-switching that is taking place.

The negative evaluations considered here focus on the changes to the traditional lifestyle that have been brought about by bilingual schooling. But although the Tapirape leaders point out these problems, this does not imply that they do not want a school in the village. Their concerns simply illustrate the conflicts inherent in the school as a place where two different worlds are in contact – the indigenous and the non-indigenous.

4. Tapirape evaluation as indication of multiple identities and representations

The evaluations cited above reveal the “antagonistic representations” (Woodward, 2000) with which the Tapirape people view their school and its effects on the community. The positive and negative points of view suggest that the process of constructing bilingual schooling is complex and multifaceted. As a non-indigenous institution, a school must be appropriated by the indigenous people it serves as well as re-constructed continuously in order to be truly effective; however, conflicting priorities and interests are an unavoidable part of the process. The positive and negative evaluations of the interviewees come both from the process of constructing or shaping the school itself as well as from the construction of its meaning within the community. Meaning is constructed from a set of representations (Woodward, 2000), and can itself be considered a representation, but these representations are not homogeneous within the community or even within individuals, as illustrated by the positive and negative evaluations of the Tapirape school presented here.

These conflicting evaluations can be understood to reflect conflicting and antagonistic aspects of Tapirape identity. On one hand, those interviewed are in favor of the Tapirape school because it helps them preserve their native culture and language, as well as providing a means to learn the non-indigenous language, to understand Brazilian and world cultures, and to assist them in their fight for their rights. On the other hand, they are against the school because it threatens their culture by introducing Portuguese and by taking time away from the family's education of their children. These different points of

view do not necessarily mean that the Tapirape people are confused about their school, but rather indicate the different facets of their identity as a people. This is best understood if we keep in mind that identities are fluid and are constructed in contrast and in opposition to another individual or group (Hall, 1992); for the Tapirape, this opposing group is that of non-indigenous people. When thinking and talking about the school, those interviewed are dealing with an artifact invented by the non-indigenous world and imposed on the Tapirape but which they have appropriated – thus generating conflicting positions about the same topic.

The bilingual school contributes to the construction of these antagonistic and conflicting identities because it is a hybrid space (Bhabha, 2003) where two different cultures are in contact. Spaces for indigenous and non-indigenous culture are constantly negotiated, and thus conflict and antagonism are a part of this hybrid and fluid scenery. Antagonism and conflict cannot be evaluated as correct or incorrect, but rather as a natural part of the hybrid model, and as a reflection of different aspects of the situation. There is thus no unique or fixed solution for the problems presented by those interviewed here. However, hybridism and fluidity also imply room for flexibility and change, which as we have seen here are crucial ingredients for the success of a bilingual school like that of the Tapirape. Hybridism and fluidity suggest that every decision need not be fixed forever, and can instead be changed to best suit the needs and interests of the community.

5. Conclusion

In the context of the struggle to preserve endangered languages, the Tapirape case provides an important illustration of a successful bilingual education program. However, as this study shows, even a successful school is likely to bring complications for the community. On one hand, the access to Portuguese and the familiarity with the non-indigenous culture, facilitated by the school, have contributed to the ability of the Tapirape people to fight for their rights and to retain their autonomy in relation to Brazilian national society; in addition, the school has helped them to maintain their own language and culture through instruction in the Tapirape language, as well as through the teaching of traditional skills and agricultural practices. But on the other hand, the school has occupied traditional spaces of apprenticeship by reducing the time in which young people can acquire cultural and linguistic skills in the traditional way, through interaction with their extended families. Furthermore, the school has contributed to the increase of code-switching by teaching the Portuguese language, which some community members feel is a threat to the maintenance of Tapirape. All these issues indicate that bilingual schooling may initiate profound social changes, while at the same time meeting certain needs of peoples like the Tapirape. The anguish and conflict that these changes may cause are linked to the hybrid, fluid nature of the bilingual school, as a space where two different worlds are in contact.

However, while hybridism and fluidity may cause conflict, they also permit mobility and flexibility. These are essential features of an indigenous school, allowing a continuous shaping of the school, particularly by the indigenous people themselves. The problems raised by the Tapirape interviewees can in principle be resolved if the Tapirape community recognizes that its decisions are not fixed and can be modified. For example, the strict schedule of the school – which they themselves chose, but which is causing

problems – can be changed if the community decides to do so, allowing more time for young people to spend with their families. In conclusion, the hybrid and fluid of the indigenous school can itself facilitate the ongoing evaluation and reconstruction of the educational program, a continuous process of shaping it to meet the needs of the communities.

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