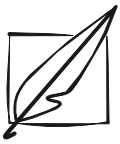

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English in multilingual education programs: some cases and perspectives

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ABSTRACT

With reference to the multilingual turn and the spread of English as a lingua franca, this article discusses the pressures for multilingual education programs and the educative nation plans based on language learning as a tool for democracy. The idea of a sustainable development of new language learning strategies will be studied in light of its complexity and its pertinence to language studies. The investigation will begin with some introductory remarks about how much complexity the idea of "multilingual education" involves, reflecting on how language matters can become language issues because they concern values, usage domains, geographical variations, and many historical processes which may be irregular. The study will then focus on the "Philippines case", still considered as a complex multilingual scenario despite the widespread presence of English in the country. Then, the challenge of English in multilingual education will be discussed in the context of CLIL programs and their effectiveness in new language policies even beyond the European borders.

Keywords: Multilingualism, English, complexity, the Philippines, CLIL.

1. Introductory overview

Language learning plays an ambitious and pre-eminent role in the education of a democratic citizenship. For this reason, the global dimension of the world fosters multilingual communication which calls for a complex view of foreign language learning.

Nevertheless, the existence of a coherent system of language qualifications which aims at facilitating the attainment of "levels of proficiency required by existing standards, tests, and examinations" as the Council of

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Europe stated in 2001 (*Council of Europe* 2001: 21), does not imply necessary references to the sociocultural dimension which should be an essential part of language evaluation in intercultural frameworks.

After all, it is impossible to think language education far from the awareness of the structural changes which face global society. Each act of communication translates its cultural origins and backgrounds; at the same time, communicating involves a linguistic dimension (the "textual one"), and a socio-linguistic counterpart (the "contextual one"), which makes the difference most of the time. In Kramsch's words, this double face reflects "the fundamental polarity of linguistic discourse that describes language as both the reaction of texts and the shaping of contexts" (Kramsch 1993: 10).

Despite the paradoxical pressures for a lingua franca to be spoken across countries with the purpose of mutual intelligibility, people currently still speak a great variety of languages, which makes multilingualism a new educational goal; in a similar vein, multilingual education experiences involve a revised language knowledge which mixes what Chomsky has described as *linguistic competence*, or what people know of the language, with *performance*, what they say or write at any given moment (Jordan 2004: 6).

The idea of sustainable development of new language learning strategies which may give the individual in global society a complex status that can be studied in light of different perspectives (linguistic above all, but also sociolinguistic, philosophical, economical, and anthropological to name the most relevant today) translates linguistically *la pensée complexe* by the French philosopher Edgar Morin: "*seule une pensée complexe, c'est-à-dire multidimensionnelle et ouverte, peut respecter la complexité du réel et communiquer avec elle*" (Fortin 2005: 110)[1].

The idea of linguistic uniformity and the spread of multilingualism, together with the unconditioned recognition of the privileged status of English, do not solve the problem of communication in all multilingual domains. Thus, the matter calls for hybridity rather than new imperialisms among languages.

As a matter of fact, English is considered a transcultural resource which facilitates mobility and fosters a wide interlingual communication. However,

[1] "Only a complex thought, which is a multidimensional and open one, can respect the complexity of the real and communicate with it" (my translation). On the importance of fostering new 'strategies' more than 'programs', Morin writes: "*la complexité appelle la stratégie. Il n'y a que la stratégie pour s'avancer dans l'incertain et l'aléatoire*" (1990: 178); "Complexity asks for strategy. Only strategy can advance in the uncertain and unplanned" (my translation).

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some of the learning policies which involve the use of minority or national languages in education see English as a risk to what Cooper has described as the "corpus, status and acquisition" of language planning (Cooper 1989). As Cenoz comments:

> The use of a minority language in education has an influence on status and corpus planning because the minority language is used for new and more prestigious functions. An implication of the use of the minority language for new functions is the adaptation of the corpus of the language which could include graphization, standardization and the creation of scientific and technological terminology. Moreover, it has a direct influence on acquisition planning because the number of speakers can be expanded when the language is learned as a second language, and also those who speak the minority language as their first language can acquire literacy skills (Cenoz 2009: 8-9).

Clearly, speaking of multilingual education in different countries involves challenges, above all those connected to the processes of the codification of certain patterns of minority languages and the standardization of language awareness through spelling rules, grammars and usage(s). Some restrictive separations between majority languages and minority ones may lead to relevant detrimental effects, both for teachers and students. In García's words,

> in the case of minority languages that are being revitalized or that are stigmatized, there is great linguistic insecurity among the teachers, who are often reacquiring the language themselves. This linguistic insecurity may sometimes lead to the use of language that may be 'standard', but that is impoverishing in meaning, in metaphors, in poetry, and that is restricted in form (García 2009: 151-152).

For this reason, with respect to the research methodology to be applied to multilingual issues, many variables must be taken into account, such as syllabus contents, language proficiency of teachers, program limits, cultural backgrounds of students and social contexts in which the multilingual educative process begins. In other words, descriptivism *and* prescriptivism should be aware of the social implications of every speech act, becoming new tools of complexity according to which language matters involve values, geographic variations, and many historical processes typically perceived as irregular.

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The increasing need for an intercultural communicative competence, like the one assumed by Byram in the 1990s, has moved forward in the elaboration of a new framework for learning and teaching foreign languages in multilingual contexts. Byram stated:

> There can be no generalizable syllabus, neither linguistic nor cultural. A French learner of English needs a different syllabus and methods to a Greek, and different again from a Japanese, and within each of these national groups there are different needs arising from age, purpose, institution and so on. Similarly the assessment of their success as learners needs to take into account of specific learners' origins as well as the language and cultures they are learning (Byram 1997: 4).

Though such concerns may seem obvious by now, they involve contingencies related to migration flows and social stabilities in host countries, particularly as people search for mediated education there. So, schools and universities become microcosms of global society, fostering or hindering expectations and cultural conflicts of the speakers of first or second generation. For instance, in various sub-Saharan African and South-East Asian countries linguistic complexities exist beside tensions between bilingualism and monolingualism. Linguistically heterogeneous, these countries may be envisaged as multilayered repertoires whose language situation results from a highly complex setting which "is due not only to the language left behind by colonists but also the diverse tribal and linguistic settings" (Smakman – Heinrich 2015: 37) that are notably known as code-switching experiences and parallel usage of different languages especially in informal and everyday communication contexts. Yet, the linguistic interaction of the inherited colonial languages and the indigenous ones, if seen in the light of multilingual education policies, can be perceived as twofold. On the one hand, "it requires more than a knowledge of mainstream sociolinguistic approaches and the respective languages spoken in these polities" (Smakman – Heinrich 2015: 37). Take for instance the interesting linguistic identity of Indonesia, with many islands and a "shared linguistic identity, embodied in one standard language. This is the official lingua franca for peoples living as far as 3,000 miles apart, whose native dialects are highly different from each other and not always mutually intelligible" (Smakman – Heinrich 2015: 38). On the other hand, according to Kamwangamalu, "it has been contended that the promotion of any indigenous language for official use often elicits opposition from the elites of those languages not chosen" (Kamwangamalu 2016: 129).

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Interestingly, the well-known distinction between *subtractive* and *additive bilingualism* (Lambert 1975) is reflected in the contradictory findings about the effects provoked by multilingual education programs in the 21st century. In her inspiring survey of *translanguaging* as performed by the speakers accessing different languages, García notes that "in subtractive bilingualism, the first language (L1) is taken away as the second language (L2) is added, resulting in monolingualism in a second language (L1 + L2 – L1 → L2). In contrast, in additive bilingualism, a second language is added without any loss of the first language (L1 + L2 → L1 + L2)" (García 2009: 142)[2].

With Lambert's distinction in mind, we may consider the situation of Canada, whose education programs foster and monitor multilingual linguistic competencies and performances. In contrast, most language policies promoted in the U.S. (as with the Hispanic populations whose first language is gradually undermined), Australia, and Russia result in subtractive bilingualism, and monolingual outcomes.

Thus, it is worth investigating whether the multilingual turn and its effects on language learning may provoke disorientation or frustration caused by the management of language programs. In Baker's words, the question is: are bilinguals "insiders" or "outsiders" (Baker 2000: 20) in educational contexts?

2. The Philippines "case"

The Philippines may be quoted as an interesting "complex multilingual case". Philippine education administration urged for the increasing use of English, especially during the 1970s, when Marcos and his dictatorship were fond of English and supportive of the U.S. policy in Vietnam. However, the national language policy did not harmonize with concerns for the sustainability of a national identity strongly based on Philipino – spoken by 99 per cent of households as Gonzalez reported in 2007 – which is largely Tagalog-based and a widely accepted symbol of unity for the nation. According to Gonzalez,

> while Philipino is the national language, the official language, the language of linguistic symbol of unity and identity, little investment has been placed in developing it as a language of scholarly work at

[2] For further reference to Lambert, see Lambert (1967 and 1975). It is also worth mentioning the definition of bilingualism provided by Fishman (1976), who distinguishes between "folk" and "elite" bilingualism, depending on the social status of particular speakers.

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> the universities. For basic education, a bilingual scheme of English and Philipino has been adopted, with English now more prominent than Philipino, since Philipino is used for only the Philipino Language Class and for some subjects in the curriculum, the rest being taught in English (Gonzalez 2007: 12).

Certain figures reveal developments in the Philippines well. English competence is still considered an asset of Philippine education programs and: "the last national estimate for English speakers was 64.5% of the population of 48,098,960 in 1980 (NCSO 1984)" (Gonzalez 2007: 8). The number of English speakers and their percentage in the Philippines has increased to 89,800,000, 92.58% of the population, according to more recent surveys[3].

The status of multilingual education in the Philippines is complex, as it is in India: "with 33 languages used in education in India, including English, and 41 languages available for study at school (NCERT, 1999), but with an education in India, as Mohanty (2006: 279) says, that is not really bilingual" (García 2009: 150).

Looking back, we see that one policy, the *Bilingual Education Policy* (known as BEP), which was first introduced in the 1970s and then reinforced during the 1980s, strove for equal use of the national language (Philipino) and English as educational tools. Nevertheless, the Philippine system did not directly address new multilingual needs in the late 20th century; the widespread use of English was mostly the result of concerns for economic power that English competences could assure to the emigrant Filipinos. According to some nationalist groups, policies that granted English official status were hindering the national language.

Still, the motivation to learn English for utilitarian purposes such as economic gain and career advancement has remained strong. In Pefianco Martin's words:

> The preference for using the national language carries on to present times. A recent study of Go & Gustilo (2013) on the *lingua franca* of Filipino urban factory workers reveals that the workers favored Tagalog as the language of communication […]. Tagalog, not Taglish (the term used for code-switching in Tagalog and English) was preferred

[3] See the map of the *Top Ten English Speaking Countries* available at www.mapsofworld.com/world-top-ten/countries-with-most-english-language-speaker-map.html (accessed April 2016).

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> because the language made them feel accepted in their social groups. This finding is significant in the light of a preponderance of studies on code-switching in the Philippines, which reveal that the practice is widespread in various domains of Philippine society, including education (Pefianco Martin 2014: 77).

The prevalence of Tagalog-English code-switching in the Philippines has given rise to Taglish, a language mix that Thompson (2003: 41) describes as "Filipino street English". It has spread rapidly through radio and popular TV programs though it has "no body of literature except in tabloids" (Thompson 2003: 41). As a hybrid vernacular, Taglish is a living language by now while English occupies a paradoxical position in the country, where it is used regularly in the media but not so in the street. Taglish seems to constitute a pragmatic compromise in the dispute between English and Tagalog.

Of the eight major broadsheet newspapers in circulation, all are published in English (Dayag 2004). Inclusions of Tagalog/Filipino wording in them are invariably marked by italics or quotation marks (Thompson 2003). However, of the sixteen major tabloids only two are in English. Twelve of them are in Tagalog/Filipino or Cebuano (if based in Cebu), and two use both Taglish and a macro-switching variety in which long stretches of English alternate with long stretches of Filipino (Smedley 2006: 37-38)[4].

Mixtures of English and Tagalog vary but, as Samson (2013) points out, certain forms of code-switching are much more common in Taglish than others are. The three most frequently occurring forms are these:

> *Literal, word-for-word translation into English of structures and phrases of Tagalog, resulting in a peculiar idiom.* Notable examples include expressions like *kill the light* meaning 'turn out the light', an idiom deriving from the action of extinguishing candles, and *I don't know to my mother* for 'I'm leaving it up to my mother'. These literal translations of Tagalog idioms are typically non-transparent to those who do not speak Taglish or Tagalog.
>
> *Alternating use of phrases of English and Tagalog in single sentences*. An example of this form is *I made him sampal… tapos I left him.*, which roughly translates as 'I discovered his infidelity so I left him'. English

[4] Smedley's research is entirely available at http: //aut.researchgateway.ac.nz/handle/10292/186 (accessed March 2017).

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> speakers who do not know Tagalog can usually follow conversations made up of such sentences.
>
> *Use of Tagalog words in English sentences, often with altered meanings*. Misinterpretation even among Taglish speakers of different ages, social backgrounds, etc. may result here. According to Samson (2013), such words may even lose their original meanings due to this usage.

Evidently, since the late 20th century restoration of indigenous languages as educational tools used in the earliest school years, a trilingual education system utilizing English and Filipino as well as vernaculars has developed. However, that may not be the ideal system. As García notes,

> during the transitional stage, a *biomedial system* of instruction is supposed to be used. The instructor gives the gist of the lesson in the language prescribed, Filipino or English – and then explains to students in the local vernacular (Gonzalez, 1998). This policy officially moves away from the total separation of languages in instruction, although it does not go far enough in recognizing the translaguaging of the students, as they make sense of their multilingual learning environment (García 2009: 150).

As regards Philipino speakers' notions of their multilingual experience including English, we find those ideas shed light on important aspects of multilingualism in the Philippines. Blogs, diaries, text messages, and various webpages provide evidence of multilingual awareness and sociolinguistic attitudes. Even Q&A sites such as *Quora*[5], quoting users' general opinions on different matters, may be used – though with caution for academic purposes – to investigate some interesting viewpoints on speakers' ideas of their multilingual experience(s). Following are some revealing excerpts from pages of the *Quora* which are dedicated to the issue of English proficiency levels in the Philippines.

Speaker A: *There are some native English speakers who grew up with it as their first language at home and in school.* Such as myself. I don't speak Tagalog very

[5] *Quora* is a famous question-and-answer website where the community of users can ask, answer and edit questions downloaded on the webpage with a voting system for each question which displays the most popular answers. See www.quora.com/ (accessed April 2017).

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well. It's not enough for the Philippines to be considered as a technically English-speaking country, though. As an immigrant to Australia I had to take the IELTS exam and achieve a high score to be considered as a skilled migrant.

Speaker B: It really depends but based on my observation, we Filipinos are highly adaptive in different language so to say, we can easily learn English at some sort. Some say Filipinos are one of the best English speakers in Southeast Asia alongside Singapore. The point is, *English isn't our first language whereas SG's primary language is English.* Another thing to pinpoint here is we speak English *regardless of grammar and pronunciation*. We happily claim that we're good speakers as long as we can utter words in accordance to our best knowledge.

Speaker C: I find it *very disturbing that the level of English among the younger generation is deteriorating thanks to the schools are not giving it the importance it once had. In high school – 3rd grade – in a class with 55 students, they have ONE HOUR of English lessons per WEEK.* Anyone can understand what comes out of that in practical and useful lessons. My high school son almost 16 years old, doesn't have any vocabulary, cannot communicate and do not have any comprehension whatsoever in English.

Speaker D: The level of English in the Philippines is *enough to function abroad* and enough to make us a really good *tourist trap*[6].

Such disparate perceptions of English say something significant about its real role in the multilingual Philippine education system. English is a focal point in the language community's efforts at both harmonization and resistance. That community continues to search for stability as PE (Philippine English) progresses beyond nativization.

Importantly, motivated contact with the language and regular usage opportunities remain key factors in English proficiency, especially as regards accuracy in grammar and pronunciation. At the same time, what speaker C and D say about the actual status of English among the young generations speaks volumes about how much revitalization of the bilingual (or trilingual) education programs is still needed in a complex scenario where "English continues to dominate numerous domains, including intimate contexts of

[6] *Quora* excerpts are available at www.quora.com/Whats-the-level-of-English-in-the-Philippines#!n=12 (accessed April 2017).

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the home, thus maintaining the status of the language as functionally native, and there is a growing awareness of PE as a language that is not deficient and may represent Filipino identity" (Pefianco Martin 2014: 79).

3. CLIL in multilingual education programs

Multilingual education has been considered from different viewpoints. The UNESCO position on education in a multilingual world has moved on from the resolution of the 1999 General Conferences and from the declaration of 2003 in which "multilingual education" was described as the *use of at least three languages, say, the mother tongue matched by a regional or national language and an international language in education*[7].

Studies of linguistically complex education programs around the world such as those of the Philippine and Basque Country systems[8], show something of the variety of policies implemented in order to integrate English as a second language of instruction. Importantly, the immersion projects developed to teach English, or to teach other subjects *in* English, represent very interesting cases in point. One of these, CLIL (*Content and Language Integrated Learning*), is the most promoted approach in European education systems. As a sort of English for Specific Purposes, CLIL aims at more than language proficiency. Developed in the 1990s, CLIL now functions as an umbrella term to indicate many language programs involved in teaching and learning even non-linguistic subjects. English is the language most commonly taught as a second or foreign language in European schools, and it is increasingly involved in the instruction of a wide range of academic and scholarly subjects. Still, although CLIL is strongly supported by the European Commission in its efforts to address the multilingual challenge, "there is no agreement about the scope of CLIL and the combination of content and language has been understood in different ways" (Cenoz – Gorter 2015b: 478).

As a matter of fact, in Cenoz – Gorter's words:

7 See www.unesco.org/education/education_today/ed_today6.pdf (accessed April 2017).

8 In the Basque Country, children experience a rare language diversity from the very beginning of their school activity. Most of the children start attending school at the age of two, with Basque, the first language of some but not all pupils (others speaking Spanish as a first language), as the medium of instruction. English is introduced in the second or third year of preschool when children are three or four years old. For further references see Cenoz (2009).

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> CLIL can refer to teaching some subject content in the language class by having some activities or units on academic content, but it can also refer to the teaching of a school subject through the medium of English or another language. (…) CLIL has become quite popular in Continental Europe, and English is increasingly used as the language of instruction for some subjects in secondary school and higher education. There is not enough research to see the specific effect of using academic content to teach language as compared to the same amount of instruction and exposure in language classes. There is also not enough research that looks into the effects of CLIL on achievement on academic content either (Cenoz – Gorter 2015b: 478-479).

What emerges from studies of CLIL is a multi-faceted picture in which the psycholinguistic dimension is as significant as the pedagogical one. According to Pérez-Vidal – Roquet (2015: 238), language learning outcomes are measured primarily by just a few criteria:

- Quality of input
- Interaction
- Cognitive/learning abilities

Although this integrated approach to language and content learning is not limited to multilingual education policies alone, it continues to gain popularity in European language education programs where "it is a motivating force for the stakeholders, but also, and most importantly, for the learners themselves who probably see that CLIL fulfils some of the demands of their mindsets, such as new technologies, access to mobility and global communication" (Pérez-Vidal 2013: 76).

CLIL emphasizes a strong interdependence between teachers and students, and in that context the language difference becomes the main agent of a metalinguistic awareness which sees learners as varyingly efficient "users" of language from the very beginning of their language learning experience. Thus, "while traditional FL classrooms tend to treat learners as (deficient) *novices*, CLIL classrooms treat them as (efficient) *users*" (Lorenzo – Moore 2010: 24).

Increasing applications of CLIL in academic contexts, along with the utilization of second languages, particularly English, in higher education settings, can motivate and increase the knowledge of language learners, helping to actualize a multilingual scenario which may reconcile complex concerns about languages and cultural identities. This is especially true when second languages are also foreign languages. In such cases,

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> CLIL classrooms appear to be a clever and economic way of turning classrooms into 'streets' as it were. When there are no streets around the school in which the language could be picked up, one may try to convert school life, or parts of it, into a naturalistic environment where the toils of the foreign language classroom can be left behind (Dalton-Puffer 2007: 2).

Although the road map of CLIL experiments in language programs has been mostly restricted to European boundaries, the increasing interest in LAC (Language Across the Curriculum), EAL (English as an Additional Language) and CLIL is spreading also in countries such as "Hong Kong, mainland China, Thailand, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia, Japan, and Korea" (Lin 2016: 3).The dominant role of English in the most prestigious universities in the Philippines is unchallenged and in a quite recent article Aquino explains how the five elements of CLIL (content, cognition, communication, community, and competence), may be part of General Education (GE) English courses in the University of the Philippines drawing inspiration and guidance from Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing. As she writes.

> The UP Department of English and Comparative Literature (DECL) offers six General Education (GE) English courses and these can be classified into two: (1) the reading and writing courses (English 1, English 10, English 30, and Creative Writing 10) and (2) the literature courses (English 11 and English 12). Among these, English 10 (College English), English 30 (English for the Professions), English 11 (Literature and Society), and English 12 (World Literatures) more readily lend themselves to the CLIL approach. (Aquino 2016: 2).

Focusing on the reading-writing connection in GE classes, Aquino points out that "Vygotsky's and Bates's ideas of *meaning,* together with Rosenblatt's concept of a *linguistic-experiential reservoir* are useful in describing how the establishment of the reading-writing connection facilitates the blending and integration of content and language in a literature class" (Aquino 2016: 7). Being language at the heart of every negotiation of meaning (be it written or spoken), "in reading a literary text, the students learn not just the word but also the world – that is, both language and content (which is at the heart of CLIL). In writing about a literary text, the students are given an opportunity to apply what they have learned about the word and the world" (Aquino 2016: 10). However, the debate about English as a medium of instruction still

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implies different pros and cons depending on the grade and the subjects learnt. As for the former and assuming the Philippines as the case in point of this paper, Sundqvist – Sylvén note that with the new policy adopted in 1974, which involved the use of both English and Filipino,

> children were to be introduced to English and Filipino as L2s in grades 1 and 2, and from grade 3 onward these languages were to be used as medium of intruction. However, the results indicated that the academic achievement of these students was far from satisfactory. The downtrend in the educational achievement was attributed to a number of factors. For instance, many teachers lacked competence in the content material they were to teach; many of the teachers who were to use Filipino as the medium of instruction were not proficient enough in the language and there was a scarcity of teaching materials available (Sundqvist – Sylvén 2016: 53).

On the other hand, the effects of English as a medium of instruction of non-language subjects may be challenging and not always good. For instance, according to Costa – D'Angelo, some results may be quite negative when learning subjects such as "Mathematics, Science, Geography and History" (Costa – D'Angelo 2011: 6). For the same reason "the Philippine government has decided recently to move toward teaching in the native language beginning in 2009 (Republic of the Philippines, Department of Education) (Costa – D'Angelo 2011: 6).

4. Concluding remarks

As speakers of various languages on a global scale, we face multimodal and multilingual imperatives. Most of these imperatives have been identified by researchers studying English, the most widespread international lingua franca used today. Studies like the several mentioned here have addressed needs related to intercultural communication and the use of multiple codes. However, the multilingual turn in education programs and policies is still in its infancy. Cenoz – Gorter (2015a: 8) have claimed that it stems from a continuum along which speakers are "being and becoming multilingual" (Cenoz – Gorter 2015a: 8).Crucial to this continuum are the various multilingual contexts: "Students can 'be multilingual' because they are fluent in both the minority and the national language (Catalan/Basque

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and Spanish) and at the same time 'becoming multilingual' because they go on learning these languages and additional languages such English" (Cenoz – Gorter 2015a: 8).

Clearly, multilingual education programs require a complex and holistic approach. Such an approach must involve the formulation of strategies for multilingualism at most or all levels of education. The Philippines "case" brings this issue to light, with its "over 120 languages, including the two official (Filipino and English) and nineteen 'recognized' regional languages" (Maher 2017: 2). Of course, national language education plans will vary for social, religious, political and economic reasons (take for instance the effects of the Tagalog linguistic imperialism since 1937, becoming Tagalog the linguistic base for Filipino); at the same time, the educational response will involve a wide range of pedagogical and political actors. Given sufficient attention, however, such a view of multilingual education could herald a more informed and a more equitable language world in which linguistic "otherness" fades in significance as the spread of English (beside other *linguae francae*) continues to function as an instrument of linguistic "sameness".

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