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The impact of Colombian educational language policies on language teachers, native communities, and the Colombian population

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Abstract

This literature review attempted to analyze articles dealing with the impact of Colombian educational language policies on language teachers, native communities, and/or the Colombian population in general. Thus, three categories were identified: *Perpetuation of imbalanced relationships of power*; *Unveiling underlying discourses promoted by bilingualism policies*, and *Opening doors for challenging the established*. Research revealed nothing has changed from 2009 until 2021 regarding how these policies promoted in Colombia are in detriment of linguistic minorities since the colonial days, helping the promotion of discourses of segregation and the exertion of asymmetrical power relationships. However, some scholars believe there is still hope for Colombians to change their perspective and critically oppose ideologies that undermine our history as a people.

Keywords: language policies, Colombia, linguistic minorities, language teachers, PNB, CEFR, decoloniality

Degree Requirement

This literature review is submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellín, Colombia.

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Preface

This literature review is conducted to fulfill the requirements of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellin, Colombia. Having this requirement in mind, I wanted to explore how the implementation of Colombian educational language policies impacts the Colombian population, linguistic minorities, and language teachers. Thus, through the use of matrix analysis, I analyzed eight articles published in national and international academic journals that dealt with the implementation of educational language policies in Colombia and gave an account of how they affect, either negatively or positively, the Colombian population, linguistic minorities (ancestral communities) and/or language teachers. Subsequently, three categories emerged by categorizing the information, and I began writing the paper.

Introduction

It is crucial to understand that, regardless of the epoch, language policies and plans issued by ancient and current governments in the Colombian territory, have always disregarded the languages and cultures of the least favored native communities (Guerrero, 2009, p. 21, 22). On the one hand, Zwisler (2018) suggests that many centuries ago, in the days of the colony, the imposition and adoption of Spanish as the language of development and knowledge meant the detriment and erasure of several native communities that had already been thriving long before the invasion of the Spanish settlers (p. 134). This author states that, back then, those language policies sought not only to make Spanish the official language, but to make it become the only one appropriate and accepted for holding religious acts, for science, and for everyday interactions. So, by being socially and linguistically repressed, many native peoples would eventually give up speaking their own languages, making them more vulnerable and susceptible to the process of colonization, because the ones that dared speak their native tongues, would soon be associated to be underdeveloped and uncultured slaves (Zwisler, 2018, p. 134, 144).

On the other hand, these processes of colonization, however archaic they may be, are still present in Colombia, and they do not show signs of stopping. In fact, Gómez (2017) implies that hundreds of years after being colonized, current Colombian educational language policies are imposing and promoting English as the only language for achieving opportunities and development (p. 149). As a matter of fact, Institutions such as the British Council and the University of Cambridge have been dominating the processes of learning and teaching in the Colombian EFL context, influencing how the Ministry of National Education (MEN) implements these language policies and programs (Usma, 2009, p. 129, 137). For instance, the adoption of the

CEFR to measure language acquisition and implementations of national programs like the “Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo” (National Bilingualism program) threaten the existence of the 69 native languages which are spoken by real people (Guerrero, 2009, p. 21). And it seems that the intentions behind forcing the Colombian population to learn English are not much different from what Spanish meant a few centuries ago since the main purpose of these programs is “to train citizens capable of communicating in English so that they can get the country involved in processes of universal communication, global market and in cultural openness, with internationally comparable standards ” (MEN, 2006 p. 6). In other words, English is portrayed as the main language to learn if one wants to have a life full of opportunities and success (Escobar, 2013, p. 57).

On this issue, Zwisler (2018) states that the imposition of English in Colombia is part of an old strategy historically promoted by traditional powers to detach native communities from their cultures and identities; that they do this in hopes of homogenizing populations and introducing them to ideologies of false progress (p. 133, 134). This is worrisome since hurtful ideologies of oppression, passed down from previous generations among the Colombian population, may make its citizens believe that none of these 69 native languages, spoken by real people, are suitable to be considered second languages or to be worth learning, as they do not present the same advantages as English does nowadays (Guerrero, 2009, p. 21, 22). This is why, authors like de Mejía (2011), emphasize the necessity for Colombians to start considering having more critical regard toward educational language policies and their negative effect on the historically discriminated ancestral communities that have been dwelling in our country for hundreds of years, arguing that these threatening policies can and have been challenging their

existence, their languages, and their cultures (p. 9).

Considering the aforementioned contextual information, this literature review aims at giving an account of the findings some researchers have contributed to the ongoing discussion about the effects the implementation of Colombian educational language policies have on the construction of Colombia's national and local native identities. To accomplish this purpose, eight articles from 4 different academic journals were selected¹. Three of them were gathered from PROFILE Journal, which is managed by the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Universidad Nacional de Colombia, the most important public university in the country. Other three of these articles were retrieved from HOW Journal, which is led by ASOCOPI, the Colombian Association of Teachers of English where publications are made biannually. One of them was retrieved from the Encuentros Journal, managed by the Universidad Autónoma del Caribe in Barranquilla, Colombia, where research published focuses mostly on multicultural and intercultural issues. And the remaining article was found in an international Journal named Apples - Journal of Applied Language Studies, which is led by the Language Campus at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland; it is well known amongst scholars for being a peer-reviewed international Open Access journal. These articles' dates of publication range from 2009 to 2021, and the rationale for selecting them is based on the fact that they all cover, to some extent, the impact of Colombian educational language policies on either language teachers, native communities, and/or the Colombian population in general.

So, having that in mind, this will be the organizational order for the literature review: the

¹ For further information about these academic journals, please visit: <https://apples.journal.fi/>, <https://www.asocopi.org/es/how-journal-PG9>, <https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile>, and <http://ojs.uac.edu.co/>

author will describe, in chronological order, the main objective of each article and its main contributions. Then, the three categories that emerged from the analysis of the papers will be presented. For the first category, there will be a discussion as to how the implementation of language policies in Colombia helps perpetuate imbalanced relationships of power. The second category will consider the underlying discourses that are carefully tailored and promoted by the MEN within the Colombian population about bilingualism. And, for the third category, the author will describe the ways in which the conversation about the implementation of language policies in Colombia has helped challenge the established paradigms that have been traditionally rooted within the Colombian population. Finally, the author will provide a section for general conclusions drawn from the analysis as well as some further directions aiming at contributing to the ongoing conversation of implementing language policies in Colombia.

Description and Contributions of Colombian Educational Language Policies (2009-2021)

The first article that the author would like to present is *Education and Language Policy in Colombia: Exploring Processes of Inclusion, Exclusion, and Stratification in Times of Global Reform*, published by Usma (2009) in PROFILE Journal. By executing an exhaustive examination of the National Bilingual Program (PNB) and other education and language programs implemented in Colombia, this paper attempted to demonstrate how language and educational policies have enlarged the gaps between dominant groups and minorities in the Colombian territory.

Usma (2009) found that actions such as the implementation of the CEFR and the PNB have played a starring role in promoting ideas and discourses within the Colombian population that exclude, segregate, and subjugate the ancestral communities that have been dwelling in our

territories for hundreds of years (p. 129). He even suggested that even though these discourses may not seem necessarily explicit, they are carefully considered in the planning and implementation stages of these imported programs and policies (Usma, 2009, p. 129). For that matter, Usma (2009) stated that the British Council and Cambridge University have been dominating the processes of learning, teaching in Colombia, nurturing the idea that English-Spanish bilingualism is the only type of bilingualism that matters if one wants to access the global market, to have better opportunities, and to have success. Nonetheless, he assured that that was not even the most problematic impact the application of these policies have; he argued that, in fact, indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and Romaní communities were constantly threatened to be erased from existence since these policies completely disregarded them, their cultures and their communities (p. 129, 137).

Moreover, Usma (2009) insisted on the importance of acknowledging the fact that the public sector of education has always been affected by programs such as the PNB. He argues that, as it is never provided the resources it needs to function, there is a significant gap when comparing its quality to the private sector's, stating that the elites have constantly been provided with more opportunities to take advantage of these policies, so they always have leverage over the communities, peoples, and students that are not so favored. So, the dominant groups, who are a minority themselves, always seem to benefit the most from these foreign ideas and plans of exclusion at the expense of the native groups and languages (p. 124, 137).

As for the second article, *Language Policies in Colombia: the Inherited Disdain for our native Languages*, published by Guerrero (2009) in HOW Journal, her main objective was to raise awareness that historically, language policies issued by the government have always tended

to benefit the elite (p. 11). She argued that even though the National Constitution of 1991 states that Colombia is a multicultural and multilingual country, there is a mismatch between the needs of the ancestral communities and the actions performed by the MEN, such as the launch of the PNB, which threatens the existence of these languages, which are spoken by real people (Guerrero, 2009, p. 12). To do this, Guerrero (2009) gave an account of the struggles the indigenous, Afro-Caribbean, and Romani communities (and their languages) have had to face throughout history; struggles that have been primarily generated from the implementation of language policies during the colonial days, the post-colony and the modern Colombian society (p. 21).

Guerrero (2009) concluded that, no matter what the period of colonization may be, language policies have always neglected the needs of the languages and cultures of the least favored ancestral linguistic communities that live in the Colombian territory. She argued a common trend is that these communities have always suffered discrimination and have been assigned connotations of inferiority, and because of this, there has always been a general perception among the Colombian population to think of these languages as not suitable to be considered second languages; instead, they have been seen merely as problems (Guerrero, 2009, p. 21-22).

With her article *The National Bilingual Programme in Colombia: Imposition or opportunity?*, published in Apples Journal, De Mejía (2011) attempted to appeal for a critical stance toward the implementation of language policies in Colombia, specifically of the PNB, claiming that it has been the subject of discussion within several Colombian scholars who have criticized its damaging impact on the local knowledge construction ever since it was first put into

action back in 2004 (p. 7). De Mejía (2011) also argued that the implementation of these language policies has helped preserve old-fashioned ideas and behaviors of exclusion and erasure amongst the Colombian population (p. 12). To support this idea, she claimed that many members of the Colombian Language Academy (as well as she has) had expressed their concern regarding the persisting, distorted association that we Colombians have toward bilingualism, where we only think of it as speaking English and Spanish; and even sadder is the fact that English is being perceived as more important than Spanish even. An example of this is that many bilingual schools (who are mostly from the private sector of education) actively promote the teaching and learning of school subjects like math and science in English, implying that even Spanish is not necessary (or worth it) for scientific development (de Mejía, 2011, p. 12).

De Mejía (2011) also mentioned that choosing CEFR as a way to measure bilingualism in Colombia was, in fact, a decision made by Colombian institutions like the MEN, traditionally supported by the Government. She maintained that private foreign institutions, like the British Council, have dominated the processes of teaching, learning, and knowledge construction in the Colombian territory (p. 10). This is why she suggested that there should be appropriate modifications to the way in which these foreign proposals are implemented because they do not take into account the reality of multilingualism in Colombia and because the main intention of promoting this type of bilingualism is preparing Colombians to be more competitive in the globalized market (de Mejía, 2011, p. 12).

The fourth article selected for this literature review is *Identity-Forming Discourses: A Critical Discourse Analysis on Policy-Making Processes Concerning English Language Teaching in Colombia*, published by Escobar (2013) in PROFILE Journal. The main purpose of Escobar

(2013) was to analyze the *Educación: Visión 2019* document proposed by the Colombian Ministry of Education, using the critical discourse analysis method. He highlighted the imbalanced power relationships and uneven conditions that are promoted in the aforementioned document, suggesting that discourses are arranged and tailored to benefit the interests of favored groups, widening the existing socio-economic gaps that exist in Colombia (p. 45).

Escobar (2013) emphasized the concepts of discourse, identity, power, and control as implicit practices that have a great impact on education. For example, the MEN, with the help of foreign institutions, manipulate English language education policies in Colombia to promote the preservation of ideas of exclusion and social inequity among its citizens (p. 46), stating that there exists an evident interest to maintain discursive practices that benefit favored groups only and to provide unequal access to education for the less favored ones but falsely claiming to do the opposite (p. 57, 58).

Escobar (2013) claimed that there emerged “three main identity-forming discourses: *discourses about being bilingual, being successful, and being Colombian.*” However, it is worth noting that due to text-length constraints, the author only explained the two first categories (p. 45). *Discourses about being bilingual*: The study concluded that generally speaking, people understand bilingualism as the ability to speak English and Spanish only. This is a conception that has been systematically introduced within the Colombian population by the MEN and other authors. One of the main issues of adopting and accepting this kind of bilingualism is that it overlooks the existence of the native languages that are spoken by the ancestral communities in the country (Escobar, 2013, p. 54). *Discourses about being successful*: The analysis of the article led the author to understand that the MEN fosters an incorrect perception about being successful,

making it seem as if by being bilingual one achieves immediate success. This is problematic because, for Escobar (2013), there is a complete disregard for the socio-economic imbalances in the country (p. 57). Moreover, the adoption of such ideas implies that English is the only means through which one can construct knowledge and aspire for better academic, social, and professional opportunities (Escobar, 2013, p. 57).

Review and Analysis of the Colombian Foreign Language Bilingualism Policies and Plans is the fifth article considered for this literature review; published by Gómez (2017) in HOW Journal, she attempted to present the historical background of foreign language bilingualism in Colombia to later analyze the language policies, plans, and programs that had been issued by the MEN in the 2004-2016 period; she found that there are underlying discourses that the application of such policies promotes (p. 139). For instance, she suggested that there is an evident lack of progression between the plans that had been proposed, meaning that they did not show an adequate articulation between them, making them work insufficiently. (Gómez, 2017, p. 139, 149)

Moreover, regarding bilingualism, she inferred that there is a distorted perception of what being bilingual in Colombia is, stating that it is thought only as of the ability to speak Spanish and English, therefore neglecting the languages spoken by Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and Romani communities. Furthermore, she stated that the adoption of the CEFR is leading English to be perceived as even more important than Spanish since, within some private bilingual schools, there is a trend to teach subjects such as Science and Math in English, arguing that it is a more efficient way to get involved in the global market (Gómez, 2017, p. 149).

In addition, Gómez (2017) stated that foreign methods and scales, such as the CEFR, need

to be reconsidered since they do not take into account the very specific needs and intricacies that teachers have to face in their school settings (p. 152). She affirmed that, more often than not, teachers' voices are omitted when it comes to making language policies, so this is counterproductive since educators are the ones who know the contexts in which these policies are going to be implemented, so it is only reasonable to give them agency and the power to make adjustments to these policies to make them work for their specific settings (Gómez, 2017, p. 152). Besides, Gómez (2017) expressed her concern, calling attention to the fact that apart from their voices being silenced, teachers' struggles are usually not recognized (p. 152). That is to say, these language policies (and policymakers) expect educators to teach a language they do not even speak in the first place because it is not their mother tongue. So, she acknowledged the need to provide the imperative aid teachers require so they can get the help they need to strengthen their linguistic and pedagogical skills so they can help their students achieve the goals the MEN expects from them (Gómez, 2017, p. 152).

Zwisler (2018) declared in his paper *Language Policy and the Construction of National Identity in Colombia*, published in Encuentros Journal, that language is undeniably linked to the construction of national identity and that Colombia has certainly been subjected to processes of homogenization through the implementation of imposing languages (and language policies for that matter) by political forces all throughout its history, hence, the national identity of Colombians has been misguided overtime (p. 133). Zwisler (2018) stated that, during the rule of the Spanish monarchy, their language was imposed as a means for excluding and segregating the native linguistic communities, and that nowadays, English is doing the same, but in a less direct way; either way, through language policies, history is repeating itself, colonizing powers are

colonizing Colombia, through language and underlying discourses. (p. 144, 145).

Moreover, he presented his concern, asserting that Spanish is now on the verge of being dethroned by English, and as it is the current lingua franca in the globalized world, people are now perceiving English to be more important than Spanish itself. Right now, all the efforts to make English become the language of opportunities, enhanced by the MEN, through the implementation of the PNB, have shifted the paradigm within the Colombian population, where they even think that their native tongue, Spanish, is not important if they want to succeed (Zwisler, 2018, p. 145).

Benavides & Mora (2019), with their article *Beliefs of Two Culturally Diverse Groups of Teachers About Intercultural Bilingual Education*, published in PROFILE Journal, agreed on the fact that even though the Constitution of Colombia claims to be protective of the diversity in languages and cultures in the country, there are no great efforts to carry out actions to actually help these minorities persevere. In fact, language policies and standardized tests often disregard these communities' needs, making them more vulnerable to face discrimination since the skills they are to develop at school will not be useful for the real needs in their communities (p. 64). This is why the objective of their research was to delve into the beliefs that two culturally diverse sets of participants had regarding bilingualism, education, and interculturality; one group is composed of indigenous teachers and the other is composed of university teachers (Benavides & Mora, 2019, p. 63). In doing so, they could understand how differently or similarly those groups of teachers think about the same concepts.

For the concept of education, Benavides & Mora (2019) found that the two culturally diverse groups of teachers who participated in this study find education as an advantage. They all

agreed on the fact that education serves a high purpose for whoever is being educated, helping them make sense of the world around them, as well as using it for purposes that go beyond the classroom itself and the educational context; that is, education can serve as a tool for solving everyday struggles (p. 75). However, Benavides & Mora (2019) argued that these groups of educators conceive education from different perspectives. For the university teachers, education leads to the achievement of economic status and/or stability, while for the Indigenous teachers, education represents an opportunity to become leaders within their communities (p. 75).

Moreover, regarding bilingualism, both groups of teachers suggested that being bilingual involves using two languages in a specific context. Nevertheless, for the Indigenous teachers, speaking Spanish (their L2) within the Colombian context represents a tool for them to fight for recognition and the fulfillment of their rights, as well as a lingua franca for them to communicate and build relationships with other Indigenous communities that live in the Colombian territory. For university teachers, speaking English (their L2) is a necessary tool that allows them to gain access to better academic and working opportunities in the globalized world we live in (Benavides & Mora, 2019, p. 75).

Finally, both groups agreed upon the fact that interculturality happens when two communities/cultures interact and exchange experiences within equal terms. Nevertheless, for the university teachers, this is not the case; for multiple reasons, the only type of interaction they have with the foreign culture happens mostly through media. Conversely, for the Indigenous teachers, interculturality is a living process, as they are able to interact, connect, exchange their knowledge and cultural practices with the foreign cultures (other indigenous and/or non-indigenous communities) (Benavides & Mora, 2019, p. 75).

The last and eighth article the author would like to present is *Language Pedagogy and Identity. Learning from Teachers' narratives in the Colombian ELT*, published by Ubaque-Casallas (2021) in HOW Journal. This article looked into the professional identities of two Colombian EFL teachers, aiming to get insight into their understanding and discourses about language pedagogy. To do this, the authors proposed a narrative methodology as a decolonial lens to challenge the traditional notions of pedagogy and teacher identities that are deeply rooted in the Colombian ELT context (Ubaque- Casallas, 2021, p. 33).

From the analysis of the narratives obtained from the two educators, Ubaque-Casallas (2021) found that the adoption of language policies such as the CEFR as the standard for bilingualism in Colombia is a reflection of the colonial processes promoted by the MEN as a way to make its population feel they need to be competitively bilingual to succeed in the global market (p. 36). Furthermore, he concluded that within the Colombian ELT context, language pedagogy is often conceived as a way for acquiring linguistic competencies and procedural knowledge of the language, asserting that this has inevitably led language teachers to become passive participants within their contexts, making them only consume and not produce knowledge. And this is problematic because, sometimes unknowingly, teachers help reproduce colonial and political practices that further incentivize the use of English as a control tool, rather than a tool to promote teacher agency (Ubaque-Casallas, 2021, p. 47).

This is why, Ubaque-Casallas (2021) declared that it is imperative for teachers to realize that the methods and methodologies they use can have negative effects on the teaching practice, but also positive ones. By understanding this, teachers can actually help dismantle generic and binary ideas that encompass teachers' identities and realities within a mold, and eventually, this

process of recognition can lead the teacher to become aware of the oppression they have helped reproduce to finally open the doors for agentive roles and stances toward the Colombian ELT (p. 47).

Now, having stated the main intentions and contributions of each article, the author would like to continue with the interpretation of the common aspects found in the arguments each article presented. So, as it was previously described in the introduction section, the first category is:

Perpetuation of Imbalanced Relationships of Power

Authors such as Usma (2009), Guerrero (2009), De Mejía (2011), Gómez (2017), and Zwisler (2018), and Benavides & Mora (2019), agree on the fact that the implementation of educational language policies, plans, and programs in Colombia disregard the linguistic minorities that exist in the country. Indeed, Guerrero (2009), De Mejía (2009), and Benavides & Mora (2019) affirm that even though the National Constitution of Colombia of 1991 dictates the necessity to protect our several native languages, which are spoken by real communities, the MEN's efforts seem to foster their decay. In this regard, Benavides & Mora (2019) and Zwisler (2018) claimed that the main intention behind the application of these language policies is trying to homogenize and segregate native peoples; in fact, as stated at the beginning of this literature review, when America was being colonized by the Spanish, many native communities, for fear of being considered less than, would stop speaking their native tongues and assimilate a foreign language. So, it is worrying to think that this is exactly what the MEN is endorsing in the 21st century. As a matter of fact, Benavides & Mora (2019) state students coming from indigenous communities often get discriminated against at schools, and the system is not doing much to protect their linguistic rights. Thus, it is not unreasonable to ponder the following questions: are

they going to stop speaking their tongue out of social pressure? Are they going to neglect their own roots and cosmovisions so they can be accepted by the Colombian population who thinks they are unadvanced savages?

Moreover, and unsurprisingly, this is not the only type of imbalanced power relationship that is evident through the implementation of educational language policies. Actually, Usma (2009), Guerrero (2009), and Escobar (2013) affirm that the elites or dominant groups are also the main beneficiaries of plans such as the Educación Visión 2019 and the PNB. To complement this idea, according to Portafolio (2019), a well-known online newspaper, 45% of the bilingual private schools *market* is concentrated in Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. Let's notice how it is called a market; this newspaper could have called it many other ways, but they chose to name it so because education's main purpose is to train students to become pawns of capitalism (Giroux, 2013, p. 33). You need to pay if you want to access better education; if you want to ensure your future. Indeed, Arno Krug, CEO of Maple Bear (an educational institution that provides private bilingual education to around 38,000 preschool, primary and secondary students in 528 schools in 30 countries), stated that "bilingual education of quality is increasingly in demand, driven by students' desire to be better prepared and in hopes to pursue higher education outside their home country". To put this into perspective, Portafolio (2019) stated that "In 2017, 29,000 Colombian students undertook higher education studies abroad, and more than 36% of them did so in English-speaking countries (10.440 students)". This is a minority. Only 29,000 students, who most certainly come from private schools, got to study abroad, in comparison to the 6.393.618 students enrolled in public schools in 2019 (MEN, 2019). Additionally, the former dean of the National University of Colombia, Ignacio Mantilla, revealed on Twitter that between the years

2010-2013, only 23% of the applicants to enter the most important public university in the country, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, studied in public schools (El Espectador, 2013). So, it can be inferred that there is a tendency to assure the preservation of social classes, where people that come from wealthy families, and that can have access to private institutions ensure better lifestyles. Colombians that do not have the resources to be at the same economic level as the elites are overshadowed and confined to be the workforce (Giroux, 2013, p. 28). Apart from this, what is also dangerous is that according to De Mejía (2011) and Ubaque-Casallas (2021), the construction of local knowledge is not promoted, meaning that, we as Colombian citizens, are often bombarded with ideas that make us believe we are only to consume what has been imported. On this issue, Gómez (2017) and De Mejía (2011) alleged that subject matters that are associated with prestige, like science and mathematics, are taught in English in many private institutions in the country, in hopes of making students more “competent” for a life of success abroad, not even in their country.

Finally, another important issue worth highlighting is the fact that Gómez (2017) and Ubaque-Casallas (2021) address the lack of understanding policymakers show toward teachers, and language teachers in the public sector specifically. These authors declared that language policies expect teachers to do wonders, but in fact, neither are they competent in the language nor do they know in detail what the policies are asking from them to teach. This is problematic because more often than not, educators start teaching grammar-based approaches only because it is mostly what they were taught; and since they are alone in the process and have no more information or guidance, as Cadavid, McNulty, and Quinchía (2004) asserted in their study with elementary school teachers, “English [classes are] rather limited or (...) comprised of basic

vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation” (p. 45).

In short, nothing has changed from 2009 until 2021 in respect to ways in which the government seeks to exert power over minorities through the application of language policies, plans, and programs like the PNB and the adoption of the CEFR, perpetuating imbalanced relationships of power that are not new to the Colombian population, the linguistic minorities and language teachers. Besides, it is possible to foresee that the panorama is going to be still dark for the less favored until policymakers do not consider the linguistic minorities and communities and stop promoting harmful underlying discourses, which is actually the topic discussed in the next category.

Unveiling Underlying Discourses Promoted by Bilingualism Policies

First and foremost, it is remarkable to state that all the articles indicate, to some degree, the existence of underlying discourses promoted by the MEN through the implementation of language policies in Colombia. In point of fact, from the analysis of the articles, there emerged two main types of discourses, which the author will call *discourses about bilingualism* and *discourses about success*.

Discourses About Bilingualism

This first kind of discourse, about bilingualism, was the most common one amongst the articles selected for the literature review; seven out of eight authors (Escobar (2013), Usma (2009), Guerrero (2009), De Mejía (2011), Escobar (2013), Gómez (2017), and Zwisler (2018)) claimed that there is a trend for language policies, plans and programs to disclose, even in their official titles, that Colombia is aiming at being bilingual, but always referring to the use of English and Spanish only. They argue this is a harmful statement, because not only does it

provide a distorted perception about the real multilingualism present in our country (where there are about 69 native languages), but it also erases linguistic minorities from the conversation about being bilingual. However, it does not seem to stop there. De Mejía (2011) also argues that such policies are portraying English as the most important language for Colombians (who do not come from ancestral communities) to speak, even more so than our native tongue, Spanish. So, having this in mind, would it be crazy to think that English will probably soon be made an official language in Colombia? Zwisler (2018) asserts that imposing English in Colombia is a calque of a colonial process and that it is not a new strategy for dominant powers to implement. So, what tells us this is not our future? And if history has taught us anything, it is that imposing a language is not just about speaking it; that is how 500 years ago, we were first colonized.

Discourses About Success

Usma (2009), Escobar (2013), Zwisler (2018), Ubaque-Casallas (2021), and Benavides & Mora (2019) affirm another dangerous type of discourse deals with the fact that English is merely being established as a lingua franca to prepare Colombian citizens to become part of the workforce in the globalized world. In fact, Benavides & Mora (2019) did a great job at discovering how different two culturally diverse groups of teachers' beliefs are regarding bilingualism, interculturality, and education. For the most part, the university teachers basically declared they perceived education and being bilingual as tools for getting access to better conditions in the globalized world; in other words, to have much better chances of being successful. Meanwhile, for the indigenous teachers, those same concepts meant a whole different matter because they see education and being bilingual as a part of who they are, as well as an intrinsic characteristic of their community. And for the concept of interculturality, even though

both groups of teachers agreed this can only happen when two cultures share the same level of reciprocity, it is clear that for the university educators, it was a vertical relationship with the Western culture (English language). They affirmed the only way for them to interact with the foreign culture was through the media, and even if it seems all right, it is not interculturality. Conversely, for the indigenous teachers, they live interculturality for what it actually is, since they get to exchange knowledge on a daily basis and communicate through Spanish (which is their L2) with other indigenous and non-indigenous communities, fighting for their rights and/or for basic human interaction.

To summarize, it would be naive to think that the implementation of language policies and therefore, discourses, is not itself a process of colonization. It has been shown over the years (and centuries) that these discourses are in detriment of the identities of our native communities, and more recently, our identities as Colombians. It goes without saying that the British Council and Cambridge University (to name a few) are aware of these discourses because local scholars have been publishing, criticizing, and raising awareness on these issues over the past few years. So, would it be possible that these same institutions do not want to lose the power they exert on a daily basis in our country, and other historically colonized territories? Do these discourses work in their favor, so we do the process of colonization within ourselves *for* them?

Opening Doors for Challenging the Established

So far, this literature review has analyzed and presented what seems to be a daunting panorama regarding the application of language policies in Colombia; however, that is not all there is to say about the impact that such programs have, at the very least, on scholars and the field of language education. Although it was evident that for most of the authors presented in this

review, the implementation of national plans and programs bring nothing but negative effects, a few of them believe there is a new door that opens for us, Colombians, to speak our minds in search of freedom.

Changes do not happen overnight, as history has proved it, so it would be ridiculous to think that one day we are going to wake up and the world has miraculously changed for the better, that minorities are respected, and the powerful have given away their power so we can construct a fairer society. However, there is a boom in the ways even university students, like the author of this article, are challenging the established just by knowing we need to challenge it. It may not seem much, but little by little we can actually raise awareness and, as a snowball effect, the tensions generated from the ongoing conversation about the negative effects of the implementation of language policies in Colombia, can make its citizens be conscious and demand the better good. On this issue, Guerrero (2009), De Mejía (2011), Zwisler (2018), and (Ubaque-Casallas, 2021) are certain that this is a work language teachers, especially, should do. They affirm that just by criticizing normativity, we are helping shift the paradigms because we are resisting being silenced and accepting how the powerful need us to act. Nobody has to wield the weight of the world on their shoulders, but we can help others see the damage these policies have caused to our peoples, and how it can make us forget what we were, what we are, and what we might become.

Conclusions

This literature review attempted to analyze eight articles dealing with the impact of Colombian educational language policies on language teachers, native communities, and/or the Colombian population in general. Thus, thanks to the analysis of the contributions made by the

authors, three categories were identified: *Perpetuation of imbalanced relationships of power*, *Unveiling underlying discourses promoted by bilingualism policies*, and *Opening doors for challenging the established*.

Research showed that language policies, plans, and programs like the PNB and the adoption of the CEFR, promoted by the MEN are perpetuating imbalanced relationships of power that are not new to the Colombian population, the linguistic minorities, and language teachers. In addition, scholars suggest the panorama is going to be still dark for the less favored until policymakers do not consider these minorities' struggles and stop promoting harmful underlying discourses that erase them from history. In addition to this, some authors imply it would be naive to think that the implementation of language policies and therefore, discourses, are not themselves processes of colonization, since private foreign institutions like British Council and Cambridge University have been exerting power in processes of teaching and learning in the country for years. However, critical authors still consider the implementation of these policies can open critical discussions amongst Colombians on the effects these can have on us as a country, arguing we have the power and the tools to become agentive and help the processes of decolonization.

Further Studies

Aiming to further the ongoing discussion about the great danger educational language policies represent for linguistic minorities, the Colombian population, and language teachers, the author considers it necessary to point out some recommendations that can broaden critical perspectives to a much richer extent. For example, Usma (2009) concluded that even though there has been a great amount of research done on how these language policies have impacted

native communities, there has not been much research that investigates how these communities actually go about them. This means that there is mainly a focus on the impact that these language policies plans have to enhance the detriment of native languages, but nothing about how these communities and schools in the country interpret, promote, criticize and transform them in order to make them suitable for their communities and their populations according to their own needs and cosmovisions (p. 138). In addition to this, Zwisler (2018) mentioned ethno-education quite a few times in his article, but did not analyze it; so it could be interesting to know how it actually works and how these programs are introduced and developed in these communities according to their intrinsic and plural cosmovisions.

Furthermore, at some point in the conclusion section of her article, Guerrero (2009) mentioned that university students who usually come from ancestral communities tend to struggle with administrative forces that do not recognize their speaking of Spanish as their second language in order to fulfill their graduate program's requirement. However, she specifies that this knowledge is merely anecdotal; so, it could be of interest to really investigate this aspect to gather insight into the additional struggles these students have to face in order to graduate from tertiary level programs. Moreover, Ubaque-Casallas' (2021) narrative study was carried out with the participation of university teachers, and it would be enriching to understand how teachers at other education levels conceive language pedagogy since they might experience and apply these language policies differently, as Cadavid et al. (2004) argued a few years ago. Besides, text length constraints impeded Escobar (2013) from describing findings on the *Being Colombian* category in his article, and it would be equally important to know what conclusions can be drawn from that analysis.

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