

Christine Hélot and Jürgen Erfurt (eds.): L'Éducation bilingue en France: Politiques linguistiques, modèles et pratiques

**Lambert-Lucas, Strasbourg, 2016, 658 pp, Pb €27,
ISBN 9782359351750**

Bernard Spolsky¹ 

Received: 3 January 2018 / Accepted: 10 January 2018 / Published online: 19 January 2018
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V., part of Springer Nature 2018

Claiming as authorities the Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts of 1539, the Jacobin decree of 1793, and the amendment to the Constitution of 1992 followed by the Toubon law of 1994, the state policy of French language hegemony was further supported by numbers of laws and regulations implemented by the Académie française and numerous government committees and agencies. In spite of this, languages other than French survived in the periphery and in the colonies, available to be rescued from extinction when the pressure of human rights activism encouraged the recognition of the value of bilingualism shown first in the Deixonne law of 1951. This large collection of 25 studies, edited by a professor of English at Strasbourg and a professor of Romance linguistics at Frankfurt, presents results of this recognition of diversity since the 1980s. It covers the development of bilingual education in overseas colonies and their successor states, in the peripheral regions whose languages were once interdicted, for the Deaf, in elite local schools, and among immigrant minorities. In the opening chapter, the editors acknowledge the development of bilingual education in North America in the 1970s, its spread to Europe, and finally to France, where a new literature of research has been developing, tapped now in this pioneering work.

The volume starts with a section on French overseas possessions and their postcolonial developments. There, colonialism and missionary work served to apply the hegemonic French state laws, stigmatizing indigenous languages as well as the creoles adopted by the slaves brought to work plantations. Omitting the fate of the French settler colonies in North America and of the one-time North African and Asian colonies (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia), the chapters deal with Guadeloupe, Guyana, French Polynesia, Réunion, New Caledonia and Mayotte, where bilingual education was gradually admitted. In the

✉ Bernard Spolsky
bspolsky@gmail.com

¹ Bar-Ilan University, Jerusalem, Israel

colonies described, recent pressure has encouraged the limited use of local languages in schools.

The second part deals with the peripheral regions of France, the direct target of state policy, and presents accounts of local activist movements in Alsace (where the switch between German and French rule has had major effects), the Basque and Catalan regions of France (influenced by developments in Spain), Brittany (where Breton has been revitalized), Corsica (where Frenchification was late, but there is new support for the heritage language), and southern France (where Occitan is treated as a language rather than as a collection of regional dialects).

The third part presents five studies of an important but long-ignored linguistic minority, the Deaf. It covers the nature of Sign and its role in education, French–Sign bilingualism, the acquisition of Sign as a first language, the nature of Sign education, and the role of the university in the socialization of the Deaf.

Part four moves to elite bilingual education: the teaching of prestigious foreign languages. It includes bilingual French–Chinese education, content-based instruction in international, European and Oriental languages, French–German bilingual schools, European diplomas for bilingual programs with French and German, Spanish and Italian, and the overseas bilingual schools that include French.

The fifth part has five articles dealing with the bilingual programs established in France for immigrant minorities: the first on new arrivals, others on North African, Turkish, African and Armenian immigrants, seeing them all as the poor relations of bilingual education. As has been noted in the US, the programs teaching prestigious languages receive more support than those intended for immigrant language maintenance; as in many European nations, the great increase in immigration has become a security issue, and the emphasis is on assimilation rather than the preservation of heritage languages.

The final section has seven chapters on new research perspectives in the field. One deals with international developments, and a second with research on multilingualism and education policy in France. There are articles on immersion education, biliteracy, transculturalism, literature, and the training of bilingual teachers.

But this is not a study of the history of French language policy in the Hexagon and the empires, but rather a fascinating account of recent efforts to deal with the many problems caused by the hegemonic policy. It traces the slow but growing recognition of the value of linguistic diversity, and the efforts to move from monolingualism to plurilingualism. As the editors conclude in their introduction, it adds to the many studies arguing that social justice in the twenty-first century demands that education be bilingual or plurilingual, and should encourage young researchers to analyze the practices of teachers who refuse to ignore the languages and varieties spoken by their pupils.

Bernard Spolsky, an emeritus editor of this journal and emeritus professor at Bar-Ilan University, has since retirement in 2000 published a number of books and articles on language policy and management.