Silenced Fighters: Identity, Language and Thought of the Nasa People in Bilingual Contexts of Colombia

Voces silenciadas: identidad, lengua y pensamiento de la comunidad nasa en contextos bilingües colombianos

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This article is the result of a theoretical investigation and a reflection guided by a revision of literature and a set of interviews conducted of two members of the Nasa community: Adonias and Sindy Perdomo, father and daughter who belong to a Nasa sub-community located in Tierradentro, Cauca, southwestern Colombia. The article addresses three major factors. Firstly, it depicts identity processes that are constructed and constituted through language. Secondly, it explores the power structures perceived by two Nasa people, one of Colombia's minority groups. Finally, it identifies and connects correlating dots between the literature, the testimonies of Adonias and Sindy Perdomo and the teaching practices, approaches and beliefs in the area of ELT (English Language Teaching) in Colombia.

Key words: Identity construction, bilingual education, minority groups, power structures

Este artículo es el resultado de una investigación teórica y una reflexión cimentada en una revisión literaria y en entrevistas aplicadas a dos personas de la comunidad nasa: Adonias y Sindy Perdomo, padre e hija, pertenecientes a la población ubicada en Tierradentro, Cauca, en el suroccidente colombiano. El artículo trata tres aspectos principales. Primero, describe procesos identitarios construidos y constituidos por medio del lenguaje. Segundo, explora la distribución de poder tal como es percibida por dos personas de la comunidad nasa, uno de los grupos minoritarios de Colombia. En último lugar, traza las correlaciones entre la literatura, los testimonios de Adonias y Syndi Perdomo, y las prácticas y creencias existentes y predominantes en el área de la enseñanza del inglés en Colombia.

Palabras clave: constitucion de identidad, educación bilingüe, grupos minoritarios, estructuras de poder

Introduction

This article is not merely about knitting stories of the Nasa people and their language mediated struggles, but rather, it attempts to observe other forms of

bilingualism and bilingual education to make connections between languages and sociocultural aspects in order to further understand bilingualism as a concept. It is also an attempt to unveil identity issues which are assaulting our current collective and individual reality as a multilingual country and as second language learners and educators. In addition, this reflection aims at finding relationships between language and many other aspects of culture; for example, meaning, importance, work, land, prestige, religion, and power. This theoretical investigation took place as part of a bilingualism and bilingual education class of the M.A. program in Applied Linguistics to the Teaching of English at Universidad Distrital Francisco Jose de Caldas, in Bogotá. It had the purpose of discovering relationships among language, sociocultural dynamics and geographical locations of minority groups in Colombia to, subsequently, find correlations with ELT.

Methodology

The class theorization and conceptualization involved a study of bilingualism and bilingual education in those socio-culturally diverse and complex contexts of the Colombian territory. Herein, many minority languages and cultures in Colombia came under scrutiny; for example, Tukano, Guambiano and, of course, Nasa. Then, we chose to focus our study on the Nasa community and their lived experiences. Due to limited time and resources we were unable to conduct the research project in Tierradentro, Cauca, with a bigger sample of the population. Thus, we contacted two Nasa members, Sindy and Adonias Perdomo, who were within geographical reach for the financial feasibility of the project. They gladly accepted to participate and requested that their real names should be used for this purpose.

Data were gathered by using videotaped interviews of the participants in the form of biographical oral histories as depicted by Creswell (1998). The interview questions pursued information about the educational system, home life, and literacy experiences. These data were mostly collected in Spanish due to the fact that the participants are proficient speakers of Spanish and the researchers did not have any knowledge of Nasayuwe. This was followed by attempts of identifying bilingualism and bilingual education issues and the study of possible connections with English language teaching and learning. Finally, we interpreted and critically presented the information based on the theoretical study and conceptualization about the subject. What we have next is the product presented in narratives, which account for the new considerations and understandings we have come to and we only hope that this will also serve to shape your own understanding on the matter.

Silenced Fighters: Theory-Based Analysis

Perhaps you love the briefcase which holds your documents or the sweater you wear on special occasions, but have you ever thought about the significance they have for you or for the people who made them? Every single piece of work of the Nasa people has been crafted with deep cultural consideration: their work represents who they are, what they have, what they believe in, and where they come from. For example, knitting carries life stories which are passed down through time and space not only through the making of the items, but through the items themselves. According to our participants, the skillful hands of Nasa women weave the wool, cotton, and all the other fibers to provide clothing and shelter for their community as well as to register and pass on the changes of their ever-evolving culture and identity from family to family and generation to generation. The

responsibility of maintaining the history of the Nasa people and conveying cultural significance to their children rests heavily on their shoulders. This duty is incessant, given that neither identity nor culture is static, but rather, as Cummins (2001) suggests, is constantly being negotiated and transformed under socio-cognitive conditions.

This is the *kwetad ya 'ja (cuetandyaja).* It is composed of colors and figures that are closely associated with the Nasa cosmogony. In it, we can appreciate the *unza yafx*; that is, the mouse's eye. The ideology behind it is to be able to raise our children with the cleverness of a mouse, which is a very important animal for the Nasa community. (Sindy Perdomo)

In addition, cultural significance is not divorced from language and language, in term, permeates most, if not all, aspects of any given civilization. Thus, Nasayuwe, the language of the Nasa community, is not the exception. Nasayuwe is the means by which the Nasa community structures life, understands their world and conveys knowledge amongst themselves and outward into other societies. Speaking Nasayuwe, for the Nasa population, means possessing one of the most vital sources of cultural identity, which Arber (2005) considers to be the right to express and share individual cultural heritage including, but not limited to, language and religion. Language portrays them as a cultural group setting them apart from any other (Bernal & González, 2007). Sindy Perdomo comments:

When we lived in the Indian reservation, I had a very close relationship with my grandmother, who was a very important person at the time... my mother is a Spanish speaker; Spanish is her mother tongue, and my father is a balanced bilingual, but I had a closer relationship with my grandmother, Rosenda. She was a traditional medical doctor, and that is how I got acquainted with the Nasayuwe language. (Sindy Perdomo)

Tierradentro, Cauca, for example, is depicted by Sindy Perdomo as the land of the Nasa people; only citizens of the Nasa nation live there, and the restricting factors for awarding membership in this society are determined by language and language alone. In one of her narratives, Sindy recounts below the encounter that her people had with white missionaries: the influence they had with one another and the history they shared together, which, she declares half joking, could never be denied because there is living proof embodied in the white European-looking portion of this population:

Something very special about *Tierradentro*, is the people who live there because they are blond, green eyed, they have curly hair... I don't know why! Maybe because of the missionaries or maybe because of the colonialism. (Sindy Perdomo)

These white skinned, blond haired and green eyed individuals from Tierradentro are often monolinguals in Nasayuwe and despite their astonishing ethnical differences when compared with the rest of the members, they seem to have no socially assigned restrictions due to their language proficiency in Nasayuwe and to the common history they have with the rest of the Nasa people. As a result, we could say that meaning pierces through the thickest layers of biological racial features and it is found at the core of who people are. As Hymes (1974) explains, this is often determined through language under conditions and parameters exclusive to a specific community.

Nevertheless, the issue at hand entails far more than just speaking. Nasayuwe, for the Nasa people, represents a matter of pride in their historical roots, respect for their culture and reverence for their belief system. This issue, consequently, sets

off an identity-related matter affirmed by affiliations established through a common language, a common history and, in general, sociocultural aspects (Foucault, 1988). Knowing and identifying themselves as part of a given social group which has its own vision of the world allows them to recognize their possibilities in the present and project them towards the future based on their experiences from the past. That is, as Ching Man (2008) puts it, identity concerns not only who we are but also what we might become. Language is the medium through which individuals are socially constructed and through which they construct the identity they are assigned. According to Luke (1996), it is also through language that they define themselves and their subjectivities. For instance, grandparents tell their grandchildren stories about their life experiences and their origins as one of the many ways of reinforcing and revitalizing language which, in turn, is the foundation for identity constitution. This is done not merely by the use of words but also by the unlimited nature of conventions and significations that this tradition holds, as reflected in the quote below:

This is the "Chumbe", this object is special because it is the last and the only symbolic representation of women's thought, because it is the women who make it. They are the ones who transmit cultural values such as language, roles and the like… (Sindy Perdomo)

The pieces of work crafted by Nasa women such as "chumbe", a strap-like baby carrier, is language in and of itself. The pictures, drawings and symbols decorating these items depict their cosmogony, tell their stories, and define their roles as their children's educators who transmit linguistic and cultural values.

Language, then, is wrongly delineated if it is merely associated with grammatical structures or terms that are exclusively related to accuracy and appropriateness. According to Freire & Macedo (1987), these components, however, are closely linked with conceived economical interests, or to an ideology designed to initiate the poor, the underprivileged and minorities into the logic of a unitary, dominant cultural tradition. In order to come to deeper and better understandings about language and, more specifically, about Nasayuwe, it is imperative to refer to Hymes (1974), who suggests that the creation of language is contingent to the conditions and parameters of the context. That is, context shapes language by allocating meaning according to the characteristics of the participants.

Imagine English language education in Colombia focused on reconstructing who students are as individuals, how they understand their world, how they comprehend their connections to their larger groups to have better access to possibilities within their world. That is what one participant refers to in the next statement:

The best way to recover the language is by recovering the land…because… Where is language constructed? Where is communication constructed? Where is our own thought being constructed? (Adonias Perdomo)

Swain (2000) mentions that physical and semiotic tools mediate our interaction with the physical and social environment. According to Adonias, Nasa people create language in and about their land: their lives in it, their dreams about it and their sorrows for it. They do not see themselves outside their natural environment but rather, they identify themselves as a part of the whole natural system and they see this system as a part of them. Therefore, they create language to relate to their environment, to position themselves within it and to protect it. They also claim the right to preserve it as suggested below:

[For Nasa people] Spanish became the in-fashion language; it was a privilege to be able to speak Spanish... just like speaking English today, speaking the language of the dominating nation represented an asset for us as well. (Sindy Perdomo)

As a result of the coalition of these many aspects in the Nasa environment, the struggles of the Nasa nation arise from the biggest and most important of the arenas which is language. Certainly it set off several changes in Nasa life. In relation to the prior idea, Schumann (1990) illustrates the acculturation phenomenon: how the perception held about their own language is altered upon the arrival of one with more "prestige", which is Spanish. Therefore, the "need" of Nasa people to speak the majority language besides their first, generated a bilingual phenomenon that entailed new dynamics for identity constructions in this society. The Nasa nation endured from the most subtle discriminatory acts to the cruelest punitive procedures for speaking what they speak, thus being what they are.

If language is understood not only as a code system but also as a process of construction and negotiation of meaning and significance in which factors like ideologies and histories come into play, then we can associate the dynamics of the languages above with the dynamics that Spanish and English have. Symbolic occupation does not only happen in "El Cauca" to the Colombian mestizo community or by the pressing force of Spanish; we can also see that same effect in other countries and nations. Colombia, for instance, loses more and more ground to foreign enterprises and governments. Therefore, English language teaching should include some of the socio-political issues and explorations of individual and collective identities in its practice to avoid problems like the following:

It was not easy for me to do my homework when I had neither the resources nor a good command of the language. It was even harder for my dad because he was punished for speaking Nasayuwe... (Sindy Perdomo)

For Sindy, this learning experience was painful at times, but remarkable, nonetheless. What she lived could be taken as a sample of what Nasa youth had experienced through the learning of Spanish. This trend is explained by Thompson, Mahoney, & MacSwan (2004) and can be debriefed by accounting for two different aspects that round out to form an approach to bilingual education that, certainly, has never suited a community with such peculiar characteristics. Firstly, the impact of Spanish on Nasa students was reflected in the never-ending and complicated set of rules that entailed diction in grammar, phonetics and syntax. Tudor (2001) calls this a structural and instrumental view to language and it is something they were not familiar with. Sindy points out that while, in Nasayuwe, the Nasa people achieved meaning to the degree to which their speech was related to their current reality, in Spanish meaning was forcefully appointed in substitution to their language and to every other aspect attached to it in order to subdue them and transform them into what the mestizo and the international community consider to be acceptable human beings. Once more, it is possible to say that these practices relate directly to ELT when significance leaves the classroom and grammar is the main focus of English classes as well as when students' background, current context and future possibilities are not invited into the construction of the class dynamic (curricula). The next excerpt reflects this point:

So then, they [the missionaries] tried to communicate the gospel through the usage of Spanish and it was very interesting what happened in the churches: they would sing "Alabare, Alabare" [...] And how can you translate that into Nasayuwe? Well, it is possible to translate banana, pineapple... but what about Alabare? It is similar to the Oh Gloria in the national anthem. They are sentimental words, thus

their translation was difficult and so they were learned mechanically. (Sindy Perdomo)

As any other episode of force in human history, this one also implies rules, regulations, oppressions, and restrictions that are, as Adonias and Sindy Perdomo describe it, reflected in the way they perceived their language and language learning in general. Subsequently, their first approach to Spanish employed imitations and repetitions of linguistic patterns from their mestizo Spanishspeaking classmates and teachers. As the Nasa citizens started to find relevance in learning Spanish, they also found strategies to improve their performance. By associating words with images, they began to support the constructions of new concepts. This aided understanding and provided meaning when the words from the new language by themselves were unable to do so. In other words, language learners need not only to find relevance in the concepts presented, but they also have to be allowed to construct their own coping mechanisms in their learning process. Secondly, Hornberger & Skilton-Silvester (as cited in Reyes, 2009) state that "Bilingualism and biliteracy often occur in a sociopolitical context of asymmetric power relationships, in which one language has a higher status than the other" (p. 2).

Clearly, the previous accounts exemplify the quote above, but we could further support it by exploring the literacy processes that Sindy Perdomo makes reference to. She mentions Nasa individuals who, for one reason or another, attend high school on mestizo grounds or experience western literacy who, thereby, place themselves or are placed by others in what McKay & Wong (1996), explain as academically marginalized social ranks. To represent this idea, we refer to the next account:

When I was eight, I had to go to school and it was there where I started to identify the difficulties of learning many things in Spanish. There was a time in which all was only learned mechanically. (Sindy Perdomo)

Coming from a society that relied mainly on the oral tradition, not only were Nasas academically required to learn to read and to write in Spanish at the speed and in the same way mestizos did by adhering to standardized "westerner ways" (Weber-Pillwax, 2001), but they were also socially stained through belittling, name calling, and other humiliating deeds for conceiving their literacy practices as different from everybody else's. Pardo (2007) also touches on the subject and reminds us that there are sixty-five indigenous languages, two Creole languages, English and other languages of diverse origins spoken in Colombia and the speakers of these languages have been forced, in many ways, to assimilate Spanish. They face discrimination fostered by the circumstances that privileged the so called "language of power", justifying the importance of writing or endorsing the learning of a given second language by presenting deceiving possibilities and practices that empower languages and individuals placing some in privileged and others in marginalized social ranks. In the same light, some ELT practices involve the restriction of the use of L1 in the classroom. This needs to be reconsidered given that, as it is supported in this work, L1 engrosses identity and cognitive aspects.

The school environment banned the speaking of Nasayuwe; it was not suitable to speak it in common places where Nasa and mestizo children met obligatorily and shared spaces as Sindy declares in the next statement:

Interaction in the school took place in Spanish, but inside doors, in the house, it would be in Nasayuwe; one would play outside and even curse at others in Spanish but once in the house and with the doors shut, everybody would speak Nasayuwe. (Sindy Perdomo)

Sindy and Adonias tell us that most teachers in their school contexts were mestizo and from their testimonies about school language policies, it could perhaps be inferred that these teachers viewed the students' use of their first language as an interference in their collective and individual academic objectives. This concept is also described by Krashen & Terrel (1993). Perhaps this is one of the explanations for the reasons behind enforcing the exclusive use of Spanish in school. For Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty (2008), this restriction causes language attrition in our indigenous communities. That is encouraging, in one way or another. Nasa and indigenous students prefer Spanish as the language to be used in public and tend to leave the use of Nasayuwe and other native languages exclusively for "behind closed doors" of one's house. It is important to remember what Cameron (1995, as cited in Pennycook, 2001) mentions about language which is not only an expression of identity but also the source by which individuals construct it. In other words, these teachers were not only forbidding students to speak Nasayuwe but were also inhibiting their right to exist, thereby inflicting shame through the symbolic power enclosed in social dynamics as Guerrero (2008) depicts it. This explains the difference from learning Spanish with the only purpose of creating relations with the Spanish speaking world as opposed to assimilating the Spanish speaking world in substitution to one's own. Perhaps all of this could correspond to a subtractive vision of bilingualism (Baker, 2006) if we observe that the use of Nasayuwe is being confined to certain contexts, causing speakers of this language to partially forget it by the restriction of its use. We could relate this to Reyes' (2009) ideas of power, as an element that exerts an effect on the way students develop their literacy processes in two languages and the reality that having a similar practice in ELT would lead to the recurrence of our repetitive history.

Conversely, the symbolic power of language transcends the boundaries of the school grounds. For instance, Wycliffe Bible Translators, better known in Spanish as *Instituto Lingüístico de Verano*, had a profound influence in the political and spiritual fields of Nasa history. On the one hand, Wycliffe introduced the Protestant faith in this society through language; persuasion, confusion and justification of acts were at the heart of these practices. This is similar to what Frykenberg (2009) depicts of what happened from Christianity's early spread from the Middle East to the furthest corners of Europe as a metamorphosis of the gospel where each expansion of the gospel had its unique changes in the different aspects of social life and language.

There were also mutations of the gospel and resistance towards it in Tierradentro. Sindy and Adonias say that those who believed in different gods from that of the Christian movement or walked an appropriation process of keeping some of their heritage traditions were labeled as heretics.

On the other hand, the Wycliffe Bible Translators "identified" a need in the Nasa nation for a writing form of Nasayuwe and they launched a program to fulfill it. It is obvious to state that this intention pretended to give Nasayuwe an outlook similar to Spanish and English. The initiative of creating Nasayuwe in writing did not come from the community itself but from a foreign entity which was Wycliffe Bible Translators[1]. As a consequence, this would lead us to associate the term "identifying needs" with the marketing concept in capitalism whereby we do not really identify a need but rather, we create it since a need is neither mine nor real when I have not identified it myself. However, they carried out their task, worked in conjunction with the Nasa people and fulfilled remarkable linguistic achievements. However, Sindy Perdomo declares that these accomplishments did not serve the interests of the Nasa people because the findings rest to date, in their vast majority, in libraries in the United States and have remained out of the reach for the Nasa nation. In the same way, many indigenous groups have been hostilely removed from their land, from their language and life. In response to it, we

condemn solely the illegal terrorist groups. What is being concealed by the mass media and other entities is that many other parties share great responsibility for such savage acts: the banking system, the Government itself, and social, religious, political, and educational institutions that perpetrated inequalities. Here language is being used to exercise power over those whose histories were created, written and spoken in a specific geographical location that now it is to be seized; language is being used to misinform, deceive, justify and submit individuals and groups of people. Therefore, Sindy Perdomo makes reference to the television set, in a mocking sort of way, as *la caja del diablo* (the devil's box), attributing the authorship of this creative label to the Wycliffe missionaries. Nevertheless, she now realizes how close this label actually is to reality. Sindy exhibits her feelings towards the media describing them as weapons of mass destruction that have been used against her people. It is obvious to state that the media without language would lose their impact; thus, not only language encompasses the very essence of who individuals are or traces the path they came along, but language also has a destructive power capable of breaking through the most solid socio-cultural structures eroding human essence away as shown in the next quote:

The Government has its own vision about the main communication processes that the indigenous peoples have; there are organizations that provide laws for language conservation for native communities. However, all of these procedures are done with the only purpose of appeasing us. (Adonias Perdomo)

As James Clifford (cited in Canagarajah, 2005) states, "Perhaps there is not return for anyone to a native land- only field notes for its reinvention".

Nasa people hold different views about land from the ones held by mestizos. Nasas cannot conceive themselves outside their territories because their significance entail different conditions and whole lifestyles. The relationship between language and land is so closely linked that when indigenous peoples lose their land, they are hopelessly exposed to the pressures and abuses of the outside world by being forced to forsake and forget their language and customs. However, the mestizo community appears to invade the lands of these indigenous groups more and more and that seems to be justified through discourse. Accordingly, Adonias Perdomo comes to the conclusion that regaining, reviving and revitalizing their "heritage language", as defined by Kramsch, is only possible to the extent to which they get back for their community the lands that have been taken away from them (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008). Adonias expresses it as follows:

Today as well as yesterday, reviving the mother tongue has its bases on the fighting for the land; because, it is our territory, it is our autonomy; it is our right for self-government… If we win this battle, there will be resources to teach the language in the schools, there will be freedom; there will be an equilibrium, or at least, an acknowledgement for the right to use the language. (Adonias Perdomo)

As we have seen, territorial incursions, political decisions, and social restrictions have permeated the life of the Nasa people in a way that hinders their attempt for constructing their civilization. As any other community, they must also be aided by physical as well as symbolic borders and frontiers to protect their subsistence. Here is where a pressing need for a deeper understanding of social aspects needs to come in to place.

Raising Socio-Cultural Awareness towards Bilingualism and Bilingual Education and Their Relationship to Identity Reconstruction

The analysis of the previously presented struggles and their corresponding implications seeks to become stepping stones towards ongoing processes of reflection, which may contribute to arriving at new understandings about our bilingual and sometimes multilingual contexts in Colombia and the subsequent approaches language educators and policymakers should pursue. The chronicles that Sindy and Adonias Perdomo shared are directly or indirectly related to language and its relationships to other languages. Therefore, language, meaning, and bilingualism are concepts that echo in the midst of these lines.

On the one hand, Medina (2005) makes us aware of the importance of creating new conditions in order to allow differences to "visit" our classrooms and feel accepted, valued and welcomed enough so as to remain to enrich our society. On the other hand, Reyes (2009) defines a matching term – *ecological perspective*– as language practices that underlie not only linguistic components, but also a vast set of socio-cultural factors surrounding language learning processes which, together with the prior, evoke principals of respect and tolerance. In short, far from being a problem, ethnic, cultural and language diversity in the classroom represents a powerful learning asset to society.

In the case of Nasa communities, a view under these characteristics has not yet been undertaken; on the contrary, some common misconceptions motivate efforts to work in opposite directions. To illustrate, bilingualism has been limited to Spanish and English alone leaving Nasayuwe as well as hundreds of other languages marginalized from the concept (De Mejia, 2006). Additionally, according to Grojean, it has been assigned standard definitions that diminish the complexity of the cognitive and socio-cultural processes that take place in it (as cited in Cenoz & Genesee, 1998) when, indeed, Colombian bilingualisms are rich in shades, colors and forms (Edwards, 2003). The socio political conditions that, in one way or another, foster these erroneous conceptions are, on the one hand, the fact that the United States, with all the support from Latin America, has developed a concept of Language Imperialism (Skutnabb- Kangas & McCarty, 2008), that places English as the privileged source of quiet domination in the "Latin American colonies" thus, being the only one recognized as a valid second language. Spreading the use of English without cultural considerations means spreading English ideologies, policies and interests that could and will, sooner than later, perhaps backfire on us. Spreading the use of one global language could also be attributed to the fact that we want to homogenize the population so as to have more control. Differences present a threat that, according to Baker (2006), "may lie not only in personal insecurity and intolerance to differences but also in perceived threats of power, position and privilege, plus a fear for what is different and competition for perceived fear resources" (p. 394).

As Berstein (2000) implies, who one is, then, and who one might become as a learner is definitively inherent to what is learned and constructed within a social environment.

Wess (1992, as cited in Norton, 1997) states that "those who have access to material recourses have access to power and privilege, which will in turn, influence how they understand their relationship to the world" (p. 410).

As we have learned from Sindy and Adonias' accounts and from our experience as teachers, students do not learn all at the same pace nor do they have the same

resources. Their processes differ greatly from each other; however, the same results are required and measured through standardized testing. Here comes the issue of educational policies and the first aspect one should ponder is its role in society. Educational policies should aim at the construction of conditions under which cultural pluralism is protected. In addition, it should take into account who people are as a country or nation and what their contexts require of them and provide them with. Basic standards for competences in a foreign language such as English tells us that in Colombia today, foreign principles and standards are being implemented across the nation and these principles and standards belong to places of different contexts and people with different resources. Here, it is important to evoke the concept of collective or national identity depicted by Block (2007), where it is explained as the ability to imagine oneself as part of a larger social group. One crucial aspect when speaking about constructing a group's collective identity is that all its members must understand what larger group they actually belong to. This is Colombia with its own micro and macro contexts and its own interests and resources and it should be Colombia the point of reference for measuring and testing educational objectives. The issue at hand here is when people imagine themselves as a part of a larger society to which they can never be a part of; for example, Europe or the USA.

In addition, through the many experiences and what is witnessed in the academic arena and in society in general, we could probably say that it is difficult to understand injustice when someone else is treated unjustly. It has to be our own personal and individual grievance to shake off our apathy and take action. That, as mentioned before, is one of the shortcomings of society today, the impossibility to see oneself as part of the larger group. For example, Nasa struggles are our own and yet we perceive them so far from our reality. The policies that rule the Nasa ethnic community were written by the same people who wrote the policies that rule the mestizo community. It would also be important to understand that the identity of a nation and its members is connected in many different ways; for example, by the communalities of their belief system, shared history, and common interests. As a system, a nation should operate together in search for its own interests. Moreover, as a system, a nation should be able to understand that what is done to other members of a larger group may have a butterfly effect on other members. What we allow to happen to them may later occur to us or hurt us. In other words, Colombia has standardized testing practices such as Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educación Superior (ICFES) in general education and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) in English language teaching that do not take into account the specific context, the historical background, or the resources of the students and that have a reference point in foreign and unfamiliar contexts. As writers of this article, we want to make evident the need for a critical and informed stance on issues of this nature and advocate for a more responsible work of the media, of the different institutions and of those people whose voices are heard. Helping the Nasa nation and other native nations in our country regain their territory means helping them regain their identity, culture, language, and knowledge: their Territorial identity (Bernal & González, 2007).

Applicability in ELT : From Current Trends towards New Prospectives on Teachers' Development

It is evident that neither listening nor knowing is a prevailing characteristic of human nature; it is easier to reap the "benefits" without considering possible repercussions. Perhaps some prefer the easy way out by choosing the surgery over doing exercise or following a diet because it is too painful a process to lose weight.

People often numb themselves with work overloads and the busyness of life just to be oblivious to the world around them. They love those diamonds in rings and necklaces, but they really do not want to hear how in the world they got them. They also love the briefcase even when the only thing they know about it is that it serves the purpose of carrying paperwork. They want to "learn English while sleeping" or "in four weeks" as is commonly advertised. They reduce life to the littlest and simplest of expressions. However, through their narratives, the Nasa participants have taught us, among numerous others, the concept of meaningfulness. As we have seen in this article, meaningfulness for the Nasa does not derive from the concept of entertainment or recreation and much less from effortless rewards, but rather, it stems from the ethical notions of historical relevance, common well-being and usefulness. Making the *"kwetad ya'ja (cuetandyaja)"* was probably a task that required effort, concentration and hard work; however, it had purposes that went beyond its instrumental use and into depicting them and their place in this world and it was precisely that which made the job and the item significant. In other words, it is the possibility of identifying the usefulness of its specific utility as well as the recognition of its general historical and social cultural contributions and representations that assign meaning and significance.

Singing Aleluya did not have a religious, historical or emotional background for the Nasas and thus, it seemed to them as though it was full of empty words. For Brookfield (1986), personal, meaningful learning does not always seek a specific goal such as the acquisition of immediately applicable skills. He defines it as "learning in which adults come to reflect on their self-images, change their self-concepts, question their previously uncritically internalized norms (behavioral and moral), and reinterpret their current and past behaviors from a new perspective" (p. 213). He argues that the self-directed mode of learning is crucial for a meaningful learning to occur because he sees self-directed learning as one in which learners are aware of and understand alternative possibilities to interpret and create their personal and social worlds.

Another aspect worth mentioning is the connection between language and culture. Sindy and Adonias recognize that language is not just the code standing alone in its attempt to make meaning by itself, but rather, that in order for the code to be able to make any sense, it needs to rely on contextual factors (e.g. history, ideologies and identity). They, more than everybody else, have realized that everyone is different and that we all have different histories and stories. We come from and go to different places. Consequently, we learn different things and in different ways. As a result of this reflection, language teachers must certainly go beyond the linguistic perspective and, as Cruz (2007) suggests, try to figure out strategies that aim at helping students attain understanding of different ways of behaving, doing things and perceiving their reality.

Camps (1997) elaborates on and supports the fact that we have the right to be different and that right is not being respected. Taking a close look at what our participants commented on in the narratives, we see that this idea seemed to be relevant in their context. Throughout their narratives the participants describe the way in which restrictions on the use of a different language in school and on being different were inflicted and enforced. Nevertheless, it is also important to acknowledge that Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan, & Street (2001) make mention that in a social context, not only its participants have the right to be different, but they also have the responsibility of learning about the other in order to achieve some degree of social tolerance. We must understand that all these processes depend on socio-cultural factors because learning comes as the result of a need. Perhaps not everyone needs the same things. Meek & Messing (2007) challenge educators to strive for a more cautious approach to educational practice bringing to

bear the importance of dimensions of power contextualized within minority-language and ethnic groups. We urge them to attend to problems such as matrix-language framing and working with communities and publishers to ensure decisions favoring minority language use, rather than undercutting efforts to empower minority communities and reverse language shift.

According to Sapir (1970), "language is felt to be a perfect symbolic system in a perfect homogeneous medium" (p. 540). Nevertheless, in English alone, we can see that language has evolved differently from country to country and from region to region. English speakers from Jamaica do not share exactly the same codes as English speakers from Africa. They do not even share the same codes with people from their own region or country.

Bustamante (2002) emphasizes the importance of accents and non-standard forms of language. Barnard & Glynn (2003) emphasize the importance of promoting diversity in the classroom. And yet, there is a marked preference in the field for employing "native speakers" in some institutions. It has also been our experience that in the midst of Colombian's critical unemployment rate, there are numerous qualified and over qualified English teachers. We conclude that even when there are human resources available and when there is a high unemployment rate, it is sometimes preferred to go the extra mile to hire foreign teachers.

Our next example in the matter concerns the standards and parameters by which English language teaching is governed in Colombia. Herein, English education is required to be taught, measured and evaluated according to methods and procedures that were designed for other contexts as such as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the employment of standardized testing techniques such as the TOEFL and other standardized language examinations. In Bärenfänger's words (2008), frequently, responsibilities and accountabilities for the objectives and procedures to be implemented are unclear; at other times, they are beyond our control.

Fairclough (1992) suggests that knowledge, social relations, and social identities construct one another in their interactions. He says that this is done through discourse.

Learning English is not important for everybody because there are needs that have priority over the desire or requirement to speak English. Sindy Perdomo mentioned, for instance, that in order for her to go to school, she had to walk for about two hours. By the time she got there, she was already tired and hungry and could not concentrate on academic matters. We can assure you that in our EFL classrooms there are conditions and situations that undermine the importance of learning English because there may be other more immediate circumstances that prevail. Attaining meaningfulness from learning English does not lie solely with the speech of English teachers, but rather, students need to understand their relationship to the English language. Teachers should strive for the provision of the necessary conditions for that to take place. Learning English as a foreign language should, then, become important when students are able to construct a personal and, maybe, collective purpose for learning it. Many people learn similar things for different purposes. There have been countries and individuals who learn English to appropriate it in order to be able to retaliate and gain emancipation. Hall (1959, as cited in Vaid, 2006) says that an appropriation of the language can be exerted as a powerful form of resistance against the dominant discourse. There exist others who do it to join in, others to be able to function behind enemy lines and others just out of desire to understand the other. As teachers, we need to create the environment to explore and indentify the reasons for learning English under the scope of a deep

cultural consideration. We need to find sociocultural relevance instead of being worried about the games we will entertain our students with. We need to get to know the individual and collective realities of our EFL students and practices. We need to be aware of our political and economical world to make decisions for the right purposes. As Spolsky (1999) has pointed out, "Foreign-and second-language teachers have been challenged to recognize the political effects of their customary work. Whereas they had thought they were neutral and academically objective, they found their professional occupation supporting the spread of imperial and world languages and contributing to the demise of powerless languages" (p. 182). Cárdenas (2006) endorses this claim by reflecting on the standards proposed by the Ministry of Education and concluding that they might have not taken into consideration cultural pluralism in Colombia.

The creation of policies and documents such as "The basic standards for foreign language teaching: English" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN], 2006b), which is the basis for the development of others like the "Bilingual Colombia Program: Education Vision for 2019", have not stopped despite an outcry of the people (MEN, 2006).

Steps towards the development of educational strategies that enable teacher-researchers and students to start exploring the path between culture and language teaching and learning could involve a search for understanding on deeper levels of the complex human beings and their multifaceted interrelations as well as involve seeking collaborative work amongst teachers in order to achieve common goals towards a better way to teach the language (Davies, 1999).

We might think that we are delivering culturally oriented curricula when we tell students that "Thanksgiving is one of the most important celebrations in the United States and that it is all about eating turkey and sharing in order to give thanks". That is certainly showing only one side of the story; however, it is important to establish connections between what thanksgiving represents for all actors involved; it is important to give an account according to the native North Americans to see if they had the same opinion, for example. In addition, the value and the power of the English culture are often spoken about but how about the incursion into an exploration of the self value in English? Many times we speak about the language exchanges in terms of the English contributions to the Spanish language; however, it is also important to study the contributions of the Spanish language to English.

In conclusion, we should start, then, by thinking about the concept of multicultural education, understood as the plurality of races, costumes, traditions and therefore language that have to be recognized and accepted (Solomon, 1988), just as in the case of minority languages, that claim for the right to be heard and respected without sacrificing their essence and identity. In the case of our EFL contexts, the concept of intercultural education arises in the field of teachers' development and language education. According to Rivilla & Dominguez (2005), for the development of intercultural education, culture has to be taken beyond the presentation of cultural items in the classroom: culture has to be embraced as a live entity that lets students go through the processes of understanding, synthesis and analysis, about cultural aspects that could be different from and yet, similar to one's own.

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[1] Wycliffe Bible Translators was founded in the 1930 by Richard Legster and William Cameron Townsend. As a main objective, Wycliffe sent young people to indigenous communities where oracy prevailed to create and introduce a written form of their language.

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