

# Preface

## Trilingualism in Education at the Crossroads

Trilingualism has a long history. One of the first examples is the 6th century BC “Behistun inscription”, which is a carving in a cliff authored by Darius the Great in Iran, near the city of Kermanshah. The text is in three languages: Old Persian, Elamite and Akkadian. Another example is the “Letoon Trilingual Stele” dating from the 4th century BC with texts in Aramaic, Greek and Lycian. This inscription was discovered in the Letoon Temple complex and is displayed in the Fethiye Museum in Turkey. A better known inscription displayed in the British Museum is the Rosetta Stone dating from 196 BC. It was found in the town of Rashid in Egypt and it is a text praising Pharaoh Ptolemy V. The inscription was written in two languages (Egyptian and Greek) but uses three scripts – hieroglyphic, demotic and Greek. Another example of a trilingual inscription is the 9th century trilingual inscription at Karabalgasun (Mongolia) in Old Turkic (Uighur), Sogdian and Chinese.

Trilingualism was also present in the Middle Ages. Latin, English and French were used in England and performed different functions for many years after the Norman Conquest in 1066. The “Glosses of Emilianus” (*Glosas Emilianenses*), a Latin codex with marginalia in Spanish and Basque, dating back to the 11th century is yet another example of trilingualism in the Middle Ages.

Trilingualism has gained increasing currency in the globalised world of the 21st century. The spread of English as a language of international communication has often added a third language to the linguistic repertoire of speakers in different parts of the world and to the school curriculum in many bilingual regions. In spite of its long history and its relevance in today’s world, the study of trilingualism in education has not received much attention until recently. It is in fact only in the last two decades that we have witnessed a surge in publications, conferences and journals that go beyond the teaching and learning of two languages in education.

This volume reports research conducted in some areas of China where three languages are used in education: a minority language, Chinese as a national language and English. Three languages are also used in education in many other parts of the world. There is variation in the type of languages used at schools and the linguistic

aims of schools, but today a common factor for most schools in China and elsewhere is that English is one of the languages in the curriculum.

The study of trilingualism in education is multidisciplinary because it brings together linguistic, psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic and educational dimensions. The languages that are an integral part of the multilingual repertoire of schoolchildren in trilingual education may differ in terms of linguistic distance; they may or may not share the same writing script. The process of language learning is not only related to psycholinguistic factors such as aptitude and strategies, but also to the vitality of the languages involved in the sociolinguistic context where the schools are located. As can be appreciated from this volume, the educational dimension allows for great diversity with regard to the linguistic models adopted by the school and the human and material resources employed therein.

The study of trilingualism at school not only brings disciplines together but also the areas of second language acquisition (SLA) and bilingualism. SLA has traditionally focused on the process of acquiring a second language by looking at different stages of acquisition and factors affecting this process. Bilingualism is more product-oriented and looks at the way languages are used by bilingual individuals and/or in bilingual communities. In the context of trilingualism in education the boundaries between learning and usage are blurred. Schoolchildren come in contact with three languages at school and they are able to use their multilingual resources as a scaffold when learning these languages. They are learners and users of the three languages at the same time. In view of this, the study of trilingualism in education is not merely one sided, in that it does not study only the process or only the product, or just one language or two languages at a time. The study of trilingualism in education focuses on the complete picture and can provide more insights than other perspectives that simply focus on acquisition or language use.

The combination of a minority language, a national language and English that we see in this volume provides a truly rich context because it relates education to the vitality of the different languages as reflected in their demography, status and institutional control. The volume also demonstrates how minority languages in China share some fundamental characteristics because of their status as minority languages. At the same time, the studies in this volume indicate that minority languages in China occupy different positions with reference to their demography, legal status and prestige. Trilingualism in education in China and other contexts is related to the specific characteristics and challenges of using the minority languages in education, including their legal status and recognition, the availability of qualified teachers and teaching materials, the standardisation of the languages, and finally, the attitudes of the people towards the use of minority languages in education. All of these issues are discussed in this volume, in addition to being shared by other minority languages (Cenoz and Gorter 2008; Cenoz 2009). One of the key points that can be illuminating for scholars outside China, who often refer to China as a linguistically homogeneous country, is the enormous linguistic diversity that is reflected in this book. This diversity is related to the linguistic characteristics of the languages, the demography and socioeconomic status of the minority language speakers in different parts of China.

The spread of English as a world language and a lingua franca in China and elsewhere is clearly seen in the case of Chinese education, where English has become one of the languages in the curriculum (see also Adamson and Feng 2014; Feng 2007, 2011; Ruan and Leung 2012). This volume clearly illustrates how the prestige commanded by the English language is extremely high, even when it is not used in everyday life. English is perceived as being associated with social mobility, although there are important differences between urban and rural contexts in terms of access. Moreover, the volume confirms the strength of the national language, Chinese, as compared to the many minority languages in the provinces. This situation shares several characteristics with trilingual education in some Spanish-speaking countries such as Bolivia or Peru, where there are speakers of minority languages such as Quechua and Aymara, who have Spanish, a widely spoken language, as their national language and English as a third language. Trilingual education in China also shares characteristics with minority languages in Spain (Basque, Catalan, Galician), where Spanish is the national language and English the third language or in France (Basque, Corsican, Breton) where French is the national language and English the third language.

This volume contributes very significantly both to China and other parts of the world for different reasons. It provides valuable information that brings together the different models of trilingual education in China, which in turn can serve as an important reference point for scholars, policy makers and educators in regions with three languages in education, to enable them to effectively learn from other contexts. It can also be of interest for other areas of China, in raising awareness about the diversity of situations and the policies developed in regions where a minority language is spoken. *Trilingualism in Education in China: Models and Challenges* provides pertinent and relevant information for scholars, policy makers and educators outside China. This volume will definitely appeal to a wide and varied global audience interested in multilingual education. Apart from making useful information available, this volume is crucial for studies on trilingualism in education because it goes beyond a mere description of the situations into a conceptual and theoretical discussion of different types of policy models. It correspondingly explores the differences on the subject of support for the minority language at school and its vitality in the Chinese regions, where trilingualism can be found in education. Anwei Feng and Bob Adamson have accurately managed to identify in this volume four major themes that can be used to compare the different regions: linguistic distance, the sociolinguistic context, attitudes of stakeholders and the use of the languages in education. At the same time, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods when conducting the studies allows for triangulation and more reliable outcomes.

This fascinating volume brings together a large number of models and contexts where trilingualism is developed in education and displays their dynamics in relation to the status of the languages and their use in the school curriculum. Finally and most importantly, the volume highlights the importance of being more knowledgeable about the interactions between languages. This is a central issue in the agenda for research on trilingualism in education in China and elsewhere in the world

because of the importance of enhancing the resources multilingual schoolchildren have at their disposal as a result of their wider linguistic repertoires.

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Trilingualism in Education in China: Models and  
Challenges

Feng, A.; Adamson, B. (Eds.)

2015, XVII, 258 p. 16 illus., 5 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-94-017-9351-3