

THE ROOTS OF INUKTITUT-LANGUAGE BILINGUAL EDUCATION¹

Donna Patrick

Department of Applied Language Studies
Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario
Canada, L2S 3A1

and

Perry Shearwood

Continuing Education Language Institute
Concordia University
1455 de Maisonneuve Boulevard West
Montréal, Québec
Canada, H3G 1M8

Abstract / Résumé

This paper describes the roots of educational programmes in the Canadian North in which Inuktitut and English or French are the languages of instruction. These roots, we claim, lay in government policy in the 1960s mandating the use of both dominant languages and Aboriginal languages. Paralleling this shift was the assertion by Inuit of their right to be educated in their own language. The implementation of a bilingual education policy in northern Québec (Nunavik) has had consequences for all parts of Canada where Aboriginal languages are spoken.

Cet article aborde la question des débuts des programmes éducatifs dans le Nord canadien, où s'utilisent l'inuktitut et l'anglais ou le français comme langues d'enseignement. Ces débuts s'enracinent selon nous dans la politique gouvernementale des années 60; de l'utilisation exclusive des langues officielles, celle-ci s'est tournée vers l'utilisation conjointe des deux langues dominantes et des langues autochtones. Cette évolution se montre parallèle aux revendications autochtones quant à leur droit à recevoir une éducation dans leur propre langue. La mise en place d'une politique d'éducation bilingue dans les écoles du Nord québécois (Nunavik) a eu des conséquences dans toutes les parties du Canada où l'on parle des langues autochtones.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the roots of Inuktitut-language bilingual education in Canada, focusing on state-sponsored formal education policy for Canadian Inuit. We argue that the roots of Inuktitut-language bilingual education lay in the intersection of disparate forces: the will of the Inuit to direct the education of their children and to have that education conducted in Inuktitut; the intention of the Canadian and Québec governments to assert control in the Canadian north; and an international trend towards the validation of bilingual education. In what follows, we will be outlining the course of events that led to this intersection and tracing some of the implications of bilingual education for Canadian Inuit for the present and the years to come.

The Early Days of Northern Schooling: Missionary Schools

Prior to World War II, education for Canadian Inuit was delivered by the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches in most of the Arctic and by the Moravians in Labrador. The year 1928 marked an important shift in the delivery of this schooling, for two reasons. One was that this was the year that the first residential school for Inuit was established, by the Anglican church at Shingle Point in the western Arctic (Macpherson, 1991:36); previously, missionaries had provided schooling to Inuit in their own communities. The other, equally important reason was that the shift to residential schooling was accompanied by a change in the language of instruction. Originally, missionaries taught in Inuktitut. They taught reading and writing to adults as well as children in the Indigenous language. In the eastern Arctic and northern Québec, this instruction depended on the development and use of a system of syllabics. However, when religious organizations founded residential schools, Inuktitut was not used as the medium of instruction; English became the language considered essential to acquiring the resources and skills necessary for entry into the modern world.

The Shift to Government Schools

The Canadian federal government had subsidized missionary-delivered education from at least 1892, but had never taken an active role in it. However, before and during World War II, resource exploitation in the western arctic (especially of gold, uranium, and petroleum) and the accompanying influx of non-Natives focused attention on the region and on the disparity between educational facilities there and those in the rest of Canada. In addition, military activity in the Canadian north during World War II, in particular the construction of infrastructure—such as roads and

airfields—by the American government, prompted the federal government to affirm Canadian sovereignty there (Grant, 1988:239). By providing such services as education to the Aboriginal inhabitants, the Canadian government could effectively occupy the north and legitimate its presence there. Thus, in the period following World War II, the federal government gradually began taking over control of education from the churches. It started employing teachers directly in 1947; in the same year, it also opened a school without mission involvement at Tuktoyaktuk in the western arctic.

Post-World War II fears of Soviet invasion over the North Pole, and the construction of military infrastructure such as the radar system known as the DEW (Distant Early Warning) Line, promoted this policy of more active federal government administration. In addition, technological advances in, for example, aviation and radio telecommunications made the North a prime area for new resource extraction activity. This activity would depend on collaboration between government and private capital, following the model of development in the Canadian west.

Language of Instruction

In the years following World War II, Canadian government bureaucrats involved in decisions about the north assumed that the language of instruction in schools there would be English. For one thing, this would suit non-Native northern residents. Not surprisingly, then, we find English viewed as the appropriate medium of instruction in the many reports written around the time of the Canadian government's takeover of Northern education. For example, the Wright report of 1946 recommended that Inuit "be taught English, as opportunity offers, so that [they] can read published matter" (Macpherson, 1991:89). Similarly, the Moore report of 1947 alluded to a policy in which teachers are urged to make English the language of instruction and even of the playground (Moore, 1947). The Lamberton report of 1948 also advocated instruction in English. While Lamberton admitted that French was an official language of the country, he did not see its use as practical because most non-Native people in the north spoke English. As Macpherson comments in his history of education in the Northwest Territories, "it is perhaps not surprising for that day and age that teaching in Inuktitut was not considered[,] even though Lamberton admitted that the most successful traders of the Hudson's Bay Co[mpany] were those who learned the Native language" (1991:97).

These views were echoed in other studies published at that time as well as much later. As late as 1964, the researcher Diamond Jenness continued to assume that education in the north would take place "in the medium of an alien tongue" (Jenness, 1964:93), despite his references to the use of

Greenlandic in Greenland's schools, which had first-language education since 1841. According to Jenness, English language education was necessary in the Canadian Arctic because of the problem of Inuit unemployment, which would vanish once mining got under way and as soon as Inuit were educated and knew English (Jenness, 1964:118-119).

Government and other decision-makers of the time thought that the exclusive use of English as a medium of instruction was justified because it would prepare Inuit for wage employment in an anticipated industrial economy. They believed that the Inuit would no longer be able to depend on renewable resource harvesting because—so they thought—the human population was increasing, game was in decline, and fur prices were too low. This belief seems to have been based on an inadequate knowledge of widely varying local conditions, and an overly sanguine view both of the rate of industrial development in the north and of the availability of jobs for Inuit in an industrial economy.

As quickly as the federal government's new education policies were implemented, questions were raised as to their efficacy (Carney, 1983:104). As early as 1960, R.A.J. Phillips of the Northern Administration Branch of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources proposed that Inuit children be taught in their Aboriginal language for the first two years of schooling. Furthermore, teachers should be "thoroughly familiar with the Eskimo language," as it was then called (1960:4). To this end, Phillips called for teacher training for Aboriginal people. He argued in favour of these proposals for their ability not only to permit a smooth transition to learning in English or French but also to preserve the Inuktitut language.

Decolonization and Bilingual Education Around the World

These proposals for Inuktitut language education and their subsequent (if delayed) implementation did not emerge in a vacuum. A worldwide process of decolonization had begun at the end of World War II. One element of this process was an increased interest in vernacular language education. In 1950, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) convened a meeting of experts on the use of vernacular languages in education. These experts recommended on educational grounds that "the use of the mother tongue be extended to as late a stage in education as possible. In particular, pupils should begin their schooling through the medium of the mother tongue, because they understand it best and because to begin their school life in the mother tongue will make the break between home and school as small as possible" (UNESCO,

1953:48). The work of UNESCO on "the importance of the mother tongue in basic education" was known to an Oblate missionary working at the residential school in Chesterfield Inlet, who in 1955 condemned the federal government for the continued use of English as a medium of instruction at this school. He felt that the Inuit at this school and elsewhere in the eastern arctic would be better served by receiving instruction in their mother tongue (Boarding School of Chesterfield, 1955:12).

Models for the use of minority language in education already existed in other countries, and continued to be developed concurrently with Inuktitut/English bilingual education in Canada. For example, Greenlandic (a language closely related to Canadian Inuktitut) had been used as a language of education in Greenland for over a century; and a teachers' college that prepared Inuit from Greenland to teach in their own language had existed since 1841. The researchers Hobart and Brant, writing in the 1960s, judged Danish colonial educational policy to have been superior to Canadian Inuit educational policy, and criticized the exclusive use of English that they had seen in western arctic schools. While they did recognize a growing tendency since the 1950s toward the use of Danish in Greenland's schools, they still saw the Greenlandic system as tending towards the more desirable outcome of cultural synthesis and the Canadian system as tending towards the outcome of cultural replacement (Hobart and Brant, 1966).

Significant use of Aboriginal languages in education had also occurred in Mexico, where this practice had begun as early as 1936. In 1939, a programme was initiated for Tarascan, a language spoken in the state of Michoacan by an Aboriginal group whose members numbered some 60,000 at that time. Use of Tarascan in the first years of education was seen as a bridge to the learning of Spanish. The programme undertook and coordinated the study of the language's dialects, the training of teachers, the production of materials, and the opening of schools. A study of the programme conducted by Barrera-Vasquez (1953) found that the obstacles to teaching reading and writing in the Aboriginal languages of Mexico were, in fact, not technical but financial, for it was difficult to obtain funding for such teaching (Barrera-Vasquez, 1953).

Based on fieldwork conducted in 1964 and 1965 in the Mexican state of Chiapas, the researcher Modiano documented how the Aboriginal languages of Tzotzil and Tzeltal were used to teach initial literacy in some schools. Her research indicated that initial reading instruction in these languages was more effective in promoting eventual Spanish-language literacy than all-Spanish instruction. Further, "poorly trained teachers who were members of the local tribes were more successful both academically and in their community development activities than highly trained outsiders"

(Modiano, 1973:136). Modiano reported that by 1964 the Mexican government had adopted a policy of initial instruction in the mother tongue for all Aboriginal groups (1973:89).

The United States has also had a long history of providing education in languages other than English, including Native American languages; at the same time, it has a long history of suppressing the use of these languages. Despite the early promotion of Native languages in schools, both by missionaries and by Native people themselves (for example, the Cherokee nation) "by 1886, there did not exist an Indian pupil whose tuition and maintenance w[er]e paid for by the U.S. government who was permitted to study in a language other than English" (Leibowitz, 1971:3). When John Collier headed the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the 1930s and 1940s, writing systems were developed for Native languages such as Navajo, which made their use in education possible. However, shifts in government policy prevented these efforts from coming to fruition.

A renewed interest in bilingual education in the United States came in the 1960s. The arrival in Florida of middle-class Cuban refugees, many of them children who had already begun their education, prompted a demand for Spanish/English bilingual education. A grant from the Ford Foundation permitted the establishment of a Grade 1-3 programme in 1963 at the Coral Way Elementary School in Dade County, Florida. At the same time, legislative efforts associated with a programme to reduce poverty were being made to break the connection between ethnicity and educational disadvantage. For example, the *Economic Opportunity Act* of 1964 funded Indian Community Action Programmes, which permitted some schools to come under Indian control. One of these was the Navajo-controlled Rough Rock Demonstration School at Rock Point, Arizona, where a school-wide bilingual programme began in 1966.

Another significant piece of American legislation was the *Bilingual Education Act* of 1968, also known as Title VII. By 1971, numerous projects were being funded under this act, including one at the above-mentioned Rough Rock Demonstration School and another in the Yupik-speaking area of Alaska. Bilingual education was good politics for the Democrats, who controlled both the Presidency and Congress in those years.

The existence of these programmes and others around the world certainly represented a significant phase in the history of bilingual education. Whether these programmes had a direct impact on Canadian educational policies for Inuit is a more difficult question, and one which we will not try to answer here. Instead, we would like to consider the possibility that events closer to home—more specifically, in the province of Québec—were a more direct impetus for the establishment of bilingual education for Inuit

in Canada. We claim that these developments in Québec, together with international advances in minority and Aboriginal language education, prompted federal government bureaucrats to become more open to the notion of minority language bilingual education.

In 1960, the people of Québec brought the provincial Liberal Party to power in an election. The Liberals, reform-oriented and nationalist, were led by Jean Lesage, who had previously pushed for an increased government presence in the north as Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources in the federal Liberal government. Among those in his cabinet was René Lévesque, who as Minister of Natural Resources, would soon be in charge of the nationalization of the province's hydro-electric industry.

Previously, the provincial government of Quebec had attempted to shift responsibility for the Inuit of northern Québec onto the federal government. This attempt had been vindicated by a 1939 Supreme Court decision decreeing that the Inuit were a federal responsibility in the same way that Indians already were (Tester and Kulchyski, 1994). In the 1960s, however, the government of Lesage, with its goal of promoting economic development, was eager to assert its authority in the northern part of the province. The Direction Générale du Nouveau-Québec (DGNQ) was established in April 1963 as part of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

The DGNQ took over responsibility for education, in collaboration with the provincial Ministry of Education. As noted earlier, English had been the language of instruction in schools serving the Inuit of northern Québec. As it happens, this state of affairs had been the subject of a question in the federal House of Commons in 1961: Louis-Joseph Pigeon, a Progressive Conservative member from Québec, had asked the Honourable Walter Dinsdale, the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, if a textbook in which the Union Jack had been given a place of honour was authorized for use in the schools of Nouveau-Québec. Pigeon went on to ask when it had been decided that English, and not French, was to be the language of instruction in the region. Dinsdale's replies asserted the position that English was the language of commerce and general use in northern Québec, and that the use of French was not feasible there, although it was also desirable for Inuit to retain their own language (Canada, 1961:3788-3789). From this incident, then, it seems clear that English-language domination of northern Québec was an issue of concern for some Québécois politicians.

The DGNQ moved quickly to establish provincially administered schools in Northern Québec. Interestingly, the direction that these schools would soon take on the issue of language of instruction was quite different from what had been foreseen by government officials, judging from the

following eyewitness account of a meeting in Kuujuaq in the fall of 1964 between the community and representatives of the federal and provincial governments. After it was explained that the new provincial schools, which would exist for the interim alongside the federal schools, would use English as the language of instruction, but teach French as a second language,

... Mr. Jacob Gordon, who had several school-age children, stood up and asked on behalf of the community if the proposed new provincial school would teach his children in Inuktitut. We waited while the two officials at the head table discussed the question between themselves, *sotto voce*. It was clear they had not thought of this before. It took them a full two or three minutes to formulate their answer: yes, the provincial schools would provide instruction in Inuktitut for the children. They would also employ local people for this purpose. For most of us teachers, this was a new and somewhat disturbing idea which contested our own educational aims and mission (Diveky, 1992:92).

Our own interpretation of what happened on that day in 1964 is that the possibility of a language other than English—namely, French—being used in the school sparked the idea that Inuktitut, too, could become a language of instruction. What had previously existed only as a vague possibility in the minds of certain people who might have heard about the Greenland experience was now on its way to becoming policy and practice. Admittedly, Inuktitut-speaking teaching assistants had been present in federal schools from at least 1957. However, 1964 witnessed the birth in northern Québec of an official policy of teaching in Inuktitut for the first years of school, which was followed in 1967 by the introduction of a training course for Inuit. This new language policy legitimated the presence of the provincial government in education in northern Québec.

Le Québec... engageait des auxiliaires d'enseignement inuit et offrait l'enseignement en inuit au cours des premières années primaires. Ces innovations permirent au Québec de s'approprier une partie de la clientèle scolaire du fédérale (Gauthier, 1989:64).

This legitimation led to the transfer of responsibility for education to the provincial government, and to the establishment in 1969 of the Commission Scolaire du Nouveau-Québec (CSNQ).

1969 was a year of significant achievements for Puvirnituq and other communities. That was the year the Inuit were given the choice of sending their children to a federal day school or to one operated by Direction Générale du Nouveau-Québec (DGNQ). It was to be our final choice, so we held a vote. Only

nine voted in favour of the federal schools and 89 in favour of DGNQ. So the following school year, the federal educational system was eliminated. The vote resulted in more courses in Inuit culture, as well as the teaching of English, French, and Inuktitut (Qumaq, 1997:62).

The Inuktitut language policy initiated by the DGNQ meant not only that Inuit teachers had to be trained, but also that materials had to be developed in order for instruction to be delivered in Inuktitut. Inuit teachers were initially sent south for their training until 1975, when the CSNQ began thinking about creating its own teacher training programme (Patrick, in press). At this time, negotiations for the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA)—a landmark land claims settlement that led to the creation of Inuit-run development, health and social services, and educational institutions—were already underway. After the JBNQA was signed in November 1975, bilingual education was further expanded and improved, and placed under greater Inuit control. In 1978, the newly created Kativik School Board took full control over education in Nouveau-Québec, with a mandate to use Inuktitut as the language of instruction during the first three years of schooling and to teach it as a subject in subsequent grades. In grade 3, parents would choose whether their children would be educated in French or English.

Since then, schooling in northern Québec, though based largely on southern Canadian models, has been adapting itself to suit the northern social and political context and to bridge the gap between itself and the communities that it serves. It has done so, in part, through education committees, which are elected in each settlement during its municipal election, and through an elected Inuit board of governors, which brings people from across the region to create a mandate for school board policy. In addition, there has been an increase in the hiring of Inuit directors, principals, and vice-principals in the schools.

By 1979, an Inuktitut teacher-training programme was already underway in Arctic communities; and Inuktitut curriculum development had become a priority for the new board, which received input for this task from Inuit Elders and other educational experts (for further details see Patrick, in press). The teacher training programme quickly grew, eventually transforming itself into a 45-credit teaching diploma programme offered through McGill University (Cram, 1985). The number of participants rose from 22 in 1975 to over 90 in the 1990s, as more courses were developed and Inuktitut became more common as a language of instruction. The fact that teacher training was delivered in Inuktitut and in Arctic communities (as opposed to southern Canada) has meant that more and more Inuit (primarily women)

have had access to relatively well-paid, long-term employment in communities where such employment is often scarce.

The course of events in northern Québec and the development of Indigenous language programmes there were a model for change elsewhere. One such change is reflected in the endorsement by the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development of the House of Commons of a policy (based on consultation that began in 1968) of Aboriginal language instruction beginning in preschool and continuing until the first or second year of primary school (Canada, 1971:6).

Another shift in policy occurred in the Northwest Territories. In 1967, the Government of the Northwest Territories was established in Yellowknife. The following year, a programme was set up there to train Native teachers, moving to Fort Smith and eventually to Iqaluit in subsequent years. By 1969, responsibility for education had shifted to the new government. The handbook for curriculum development, which appeared in 1971 under the auspices of the Government of the Northwest Territories, stated that "in those settlements wherein the mother tongue is the language of common currency the learning programme at the kindergarten through grade three levels is to be carried on in the mother tongue with English being introduced gradually, and specifically taught as a second language" (Northwest Territories, 1971:3).

Consultation carried out in preparing the 1972 Survey of Education revealed that the policy of bilingual education was supported in Inuit communities (Northwest Territories, 1972:183). Amendments to the *Education Ordinance* in 1977 endorsed this policy, subject to local control. The policy was reaffirmed by the Special Committee on Education, which published its report in 1982 (Northwest Territories, 1982:87).

Summary and Conclusions

What we have tried to show in this paper is that the sources of language policy widely adopted in the Canadian Arctic in the 1970s, though little known or acknowledged, can be traced to the Nouveau-Québec of the 1960s. During this time, there was a shift in government policy from a promotion of the use of English as the language of education to a promotion of the use of Aboriginal languages as well as French and English. These developments took place under particular historical, political, and social conditions, including (i) a period of decolonization following World War II; (ii) widespread acceptance of the conclusions of the 1953 UNESCO report on the use of vernacular languages in education; (iii) awareness by government officials, Inuit, and others in Canada of the long history of Greenlandic as a language of instruction in Greenland; (iv) the establishment of the

Direction Générale du Nouveau-Québec (DGNQ) in 1963 to insure a Québec government presence in northern Québec; and finally (v) the assertion by the Inuit themselves of their right to education in their own language.

As Québec Inuit politically mobilized in the mid-1970s, institutional control became a major issue in the North. With the signing of the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement, Inuktitut and its promotion became key to the process of defining the territory now known as Nunavik. Inuit teacher training and curriculum development, which began in the late 1960s, were turned over to the Kativik School Board in 1978, leading to the present state of affairs, whereby teachers are trained in Inuktitut in Arctic Québec. This transition depended on a number of dedicated Inuit teachers, curriculum developers, and non-Native personnel, who were able to make these institutional changes a success (Patrick, in press).

Some authors have seen the efforts to create an Inuktitut-language bilingual educational policy as limited, serving largely to permit a smooth transition to the dominant languages or even to promote the assimilation of Inuit into mainstream Canadian culture (Clarke and MacKenzie, 1980). While this may be true in some instances, developments in this area have often promoted language maintenance, greater employment opportunities for Inuit, greater communication between dialect areas through language standardization, improved relations between the school and community, and increased academic performance among Inuit students. Promotion of Inuktitut language in schools has also fostered pride in Inuit cultural and linguistic heritage, and increased the value of Inuktitut in Inuit political and social identity (Shearwood, 1998; Patrick, 1998). The events of the 1960s in northern Québec (now Nunavik) have thus shown that Aboriginal-language bilingual education is feasible.

Notes

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