Identity-Forming Discourses: A Critical Discourse Analysis on Policy Making Processes Concerning English Language Teaching in Colombia

Discursos que forjan identidades: un análisis crítico de discursos en la formulación de políticas sobre la enseñanza del inglés en Colombia

Wilder Yesid Escobar Alméciga*
Universidad El Bosque, Colombia

This article addresses a critical problem about asymmetrical power relationships and uneven conditions in English language education exerted via identity shaping discourses in the document Educación: *Visión 2019* issued by the Colombian Ministry of National Education. The study follows the critical discourse analysis method. It characterizes discursive strategies which, in turn, unveil power structures, means of control, and subject positioning of submission and dominance inherent in three main categories: *Being bilingual, being successful, and being Colombian*. It concludes that discourses are being strategically employed by the Colombian Ministry of National Education to change or preserve ideologies and to widen gaps between socio-economic groups to protect the interests of only a small segment of the population.

Key words: Critical discourse analysis, dominance and control, language identity, power.

Este reporte postula una problemática de relaciones desequilibradas de dominio, poder, control y de la desproporcionada distribución de recursos en la enseñanza del inglés en Colombia, lo cual es perpetrado por discursos que moldean la identidad, en el documento *Educación: Visión 2019* publicado por el Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia. El estudio sigue los principios del análisis crítico del discurso. Esta investigación caracteriza estrategias discursivas que a su vez develan estructuras de poder, medios de control, y posicionamiento de sumisión y dominio en tres categorías: *ser bilingüe, ser exitoso y ser colombiano.* El estudio sugiere que el Ministerio de Educación Nacional está empleando discursos para manipular ideologías y generar inequidad entre grupos sociales en tanto que protege los intereses de un segmento de la población exclusivamente.

Palabras clave: análisis crítico del discurso, dominio y control, identidad lingüística, poder.

*   E-mail: escobar.w@gmail.com

Introduction

Discourse, identity, power and control appear to be practices that sometimes escape our attention in our teaching practices but that exert an enormous influence in education nonetheless. This research study looks into English language educational policies that could potentially be seen as "practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972 as cited in Cameron, 2001, p. 15) and postulates a problem when this identity forming potential is, on the one hand, taken for granted by people resulting in greater opportunities for institutions like the *Ministerio de Educación Nacional* (Colombian Ministry of National Education, MEN for its acronym in Spanish) to take advantage thereof to safeguard their own interests; and on the other hand, manipulated by the MEN to nurture identities that would naturally accept processes of exclusion, unequal social structures and thus, unfair educational conditions governed by foreign intentions. Therefore, this report begins by presenting the document *Educación: visión 2019: propuesta para la discusión* (Education: Vision 2019: proposal for discussion, MEN, 2006a) as a sample of the discursive dynamics which seek to transform identities to protect specific interests. Then, it substantiates the problem by introducing an overview of English language policy-making processes in Colombia followed by an exploration of literature on the concepts of identity, discourse, power and control. Finally, it analyzes the document Education: Vision 2019 (MEN, 2006a) in light of these concepts as well as in the principles proposed by Fairclough (2003), drawing conclusions which appeal to the questions about identity formations set forth in the project.

English Language Teaching Policy Making in Colombia: An Overview

A great concern for having English language teaching standards in the Colombian educational system arose in the first half of the last decade. Consequently, the MEN sought the adoption of principles and patterns from the Common European Framework (CEF) for the teaching of English and legitimized this implementation in the years that followed through policies like *Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo* (National Bilingualism Program) (MEN, 2004); Education: Vision 2019: A proposal for discussion (MEN, 2006a); *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo Educativo* (National Plan for Educational Development) (MEN, 2007); *Estándares básicos de competencias en lenguas extranjeras: inglés.* (Basic standards for competences in foreign languages: English; MEN, 2006b). In response to this initiative, Ayala and Álvarez (2005) critically presented some implications of adopting the CEF for the teaching of English in Colombia. Their study was founded on theoretical principles of bilingualism and bilingual education. Their study was also organized around three main concerns: The need to understand Colombia's geographical conditions as different from those of European countries; the need to consider the specific characteristics of English language teachers and students in Colombia; and the particularities of the Colombian educational system and its policy making processes. Even though this article and many others (e.g. Sánchez & Obando, 2008) advocated for Colombia's own construction of a set of English language teaching standards based on Colombia's context and its specific socio-cultural needs, not only was the CEF readily accepted, it also became a conscious and unconscious reference point for many, if not most, of the English language practices which systematically fosters identities in regard to how we understand ourselves as English language users. For instance: testing practices under the CEF standards categorize teachers' and students' levels of English proficiency within a given social place based on foreign contextual information: some are B1 teachers; some are A2 students and so on and so forth,

and this categorization is now willingly accepted by institutions to measure their teachers, and by teachers and students to define themselves as language users.

In 2008, when the standards had already been adopted by the Colombian educational system, Guerrero (2008) studied the document Basic standards for competences in foreign languages: English. Teaching in Foreign languages: The challenge! Her research report was guided by theory on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and on the symbolic power of language. Guerrero (2008) explains connotations strategically assigned to concepts of bilingualism for the purpose of vindicating the bilingualism plan designed for Colombia. The article unveils a tactical alliance between the British Council (BC) and the MEN which sought to preserve and protect interests of varying natures. Guerrero (2008) concludes that being bilingual is intended to mean speaking English, and that the concept of "bilingualism" is presented as a monolithic and homogeneous idea.

Others have sought to resist this power and control directly and/or indirectly, advocating for socio-cultural considerations in English language teaching and policy making. Pardo (2007), for example, raises awareness about the linguistic diversity in Colombia and illustrates the hierarchical stratification to which languages are subjected by means of different social acts. In his article, he pinpoints some flaws in the educational system and attributes them to the fact that policy makers are not qualified to make decisions that seek the social, cognitive, and emotional wellbeing of the country's citizens. Colombia is a linguistically and socially diverse country and this diversity comes with a great richness in terms of knowledge; however, this diversity also suggests a great level of intricacy in the educational processes that the nation must understand in order to undertake the process of change. Colombia's educational authorities should identify the numerous linguistic needs facing the country (Mejía, 2011).

In brief, the identity-transforming power of English language policies in Colombia has taken many shapes: from coming to understand as bilinguals those who speak English (regardless of whether or not they speak any other language), to determining who is competent to teach the language and dictating how these individuals should teach. The aforementioned researchers identified three main aims that the MEN has been strategically achieving through discourses on English language policy. First, the MEN has imported and enforced foreign standards to govern Colombia's foreign language teaching processes and, in so doing, disregarded socio-cultural considerations. Second, it has been changing people's minds in order for them to assume those standards as the ruling factor that defines teachers and students as second language users. Finally, it has established tactical alliances to protect interests different from English language education stratifying and excluding, thereby, languages, individuals, institutions, and communities. Therefore, this research report attempts to answer the following questions using the textual analysis framework of CDA provided by Fairclough (2003):

- What identity-forming discourses regarding English language teaching can be unveiled in the document Education: Vision 2019?
- What do discursive strategies reveal about the way content is being produced, presented, handled, transformed, and/or manipulated in the document Education: Vision 2019?

Theoretical Framework

Foucault (1988) speaks about identity processes in terms that are entirely related to affiliation dynamics. He proposes the existence of an "unlimited supply" (e.g. of values, knowledge and religions, among others). From such a supply, human beings can find correspondences and/or discrepancies and consequently take one of four options: (1) adopt them and reproduce them with little or no questioning, (2)

accept them by giving them their own interpretation and thus undergoing a process of appropriation, (3) prevent them from constructing knowledge and exclusively taking aspects of their own culture, and (4) suppress them and ignore them leaving no room for construction but rather, for negation about the different possibilities otherness could bring about. Identity in this case is a matter of choice that is governed by our understandings and perceptions of the world's supply. Herein, one may find correspondences; things and choices that individuals totally or partially subscribe to or that are ascribed to the social environment; and/or discrepancies, things that do not match the individual's or group's interests and that, accordingly, are totally or partially rejected.

Likewise, Norton (1997) agrees that identity is constructed through relationships. She refers to identity as the way in which people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future in light of this relationship. Essentially, people establish different types of relationships with the world depending on numerous factors, one of them being language. Block (2007) refers to this phenomenon as Language identity, and associates it with language expertise, language affiliation and language inheritance. Expertise is how proficient a person is in a language, dialect, or socio-dialect. Affiliation refers to how an individual views a particular language dialect or socio-dialect and what attitudes she or he adopts toward it. Finally, inheritance is a matter of being born into a family or community that is associated with a particular language, dialect, and socio-dialect.

Bucholtz and Hall (2004) mention a more detailed explanation of the relationship between language and identity in general. One of the most valuable contributions is their exploration of the sub-concepts that compose the umbrella concept of Identity. "Sameness", they note, is what allows individuals to imagine themselves as part of a larger group, whereas "difference" is a distance marker between those who perceive themselves as unlike even within the same group. Consequently, they use the term "markedness" as the way in which similarities and differences are organized hierarchically in social contexts. Markedness is very important in this case, because it usually represents a default status of social categories such as masculinity, whiteness, heterosexuality and so forth. Anyone differing from the standard is, thereby, predetermined to have to take additional actions to position him or herself in society.

Understanding these concepts allows us to unveil uneven wealth distribution and conditions for different social groups as Lister (2006) does in his exploration of globalization and identity. As we can see, there are many different types of linguistic needs that affect different social groups in Colombia, but the nation is only focused on addressing one type of linguistic need for a small segment of Colombia's population (Vargas, 2010) thus, one kind of bilingual education that benefits only a specific sector rather than all as it is falsely advertised. Escobar and Gómez (2010) carried out a bibliographical investigation whereby the authors identified unequal conditions and identity related processes that are constructed and constituted through language. The authors draw clear associations to and from English language teaching and policy-making to advocate for socio-cultural considerations regarding English language teaching and policy making practices. Similarly, Cuasialpud (2010) argues on behalf of indigenous students at university level in Colombia that their access to education is diminished by the institutional systematized registration practices and, above all, by the students' own language barriers. These students speak Spanish as a second language and have not been embraced by a bilingual program that supports them in their Spanish learning. She also describes some cultural implications of learning English as a third language when members of such

communities already struggle with the learning of Spanish as a second language, inarguably a greater need for these individuals.

Furthermore, Norton (2000) makes reference to the close relationship between identity and learning made possible by the strong and direct relationship that exists between identity and discourse. McCarthy (1991) implies that discourse is the study of language in use; that is, the study of meaning in context. One aspect of language clusters vocabulary, structures and functions together to exert modes of communication; another aspect is interaction among people and the association of language with specific and general contexts. Thus, it is worth noting that some discourse analysts focus their attention on a given piece of language or socio-linguistic function.

Cameron (2001) argues that defining discourse as language beyond the sentence level or language in use falls short; she depicts it as ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body postures and clothing. In his words, "a discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with appropriate costumes and instructions on how to act, talk and often write so as to take a particular social role that others will recognize" (Gee, 1996, p. 56). In addition, Gee (1999) comes to the conclusion that discourse is a system by which meaning is emitted, gathered and appropriated. Put another way, discourse is a multifaceted and complex social act which encloses all aspects of individual and collective identity and thus plays a significant role in forming and transforming identities (Huerta, López-Reza, & García, 2007).

Foucault (1988) defines discourse as "a set of historically grounded statements that exhibit regularities in presuppositions, thematic choices, values, etc.; that limit what can be said about something, by whom, when, where, and how; and that are underwritten by some form of institutional authority"

(cited in McKay & Wong, 1996, p. 579). Having this definition as a point of reference makes it possible to observe regularities in presupposition, thematic choices, and values through discourse analysis. According to McCarthy (1991), these considerations are relevant to the study of relationships between a language and the context it is used in.

> We construct and reconstruct our views about the world as well as our relationships to one another through discourse. It is also through discourses of language that we use strategies to position and reposition our 'selves' with regards to thinking, doing, and being. (Clark, 2010, p. 20)

In this respect, Gale (1996) suggests that educators, institutions, and policy makers are co-constructors of knowledge, identity and culture. If educators, as co-constructors of knowledge, identity and culture communicate colonial, gender biased, racist, and/or degrading messages to a community by hierarchically stratifying languages, regulating access to English education, and teaching English in technical ways with little or no regard for the analysis of its content, then it is very possible that such a community learns English at the expense of its self-value and freedom. Just as Van Dijk (1993, p. 254) states, "Modern and more effective power is mostly cognitive, and enacted by persuasion, dissimulation, or manipulation, among other strategic ways to change the minds of others in one's own interests." Discourse has a part in the production and reproduction of both domination and resistance to it.

Fairclough (2003) complements explaining discourse in three ways:

> [...] firstly as 'part of the action. We can distinguish different genres as different ways of (inter) acting discursively' [...]; Secondly, discourse figures in the representations of the material world, of other social practices, reflexive self-representations of the practice in question [...]; Thirdly and finally, discourse figures alongside bodily behavior in constituting particular ways of being, particular social or personal identities. (p. 27)

Hawthorn (1992) added to this by saying that "The nature [of discourse] shapes the terms in which an individual perceives the world, regardless of conscious intentions" (cited in McKay & Wong 1996, p. 585). Now we could say that discourses are not merely expressions of individual and collective identities but are guided by intentions to safeguard interests and strive for specific objectives, thus shaping identities.

Furthermore, discourses not only exert power, they also maintain control. This difference between power and control that I am introducing is based on Bernstein (1998), who notes that the two concepts are closely interrelated operating on different levels of analysis. In the empirical sphere, relations of power create, justify and reproduce limits between different group categories: gender, social class, nationality, etc. In other words, power is exerted to create division and to widen the gap in social groups through power acts on the inter-category relationships. Control, on the other hand, establishes legitimate communication forms relevant to the different categories. We could say that control establishes legitimate forms of communication and generates the legitimate relations between categories. Control signals the relations of power within the limits of each category and power informs about the nature of this relationship and it is through discourse that they are justified in order for them to be exerted.

In summation, identity is a historical and socio-cultural structure which makes the ever-changing co-formations of relationships possible between the self and the world and that, through discourse, allows us to identify, understand, conceive, construct, and accept or reject the different possibilities within a given time and space while seeking individual or collective interests. Accordingly, identity is closely and directly related to discourse since this is how individuals act and interact, position themselves and are positioned in a social place, a way of being in the world, and thus a way to form and transform identities.

Research Method

This study falls within the boundaries of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and its objectives concern the examination of written text to characterize identity related processes shaped by educational policies regarding English language education in Colombia. In order to achieve this end, this research is informed by Fairclough (2003), who describes two levels of analysis. A first level, called intra-textual analysis, studies the relationships between the linguistic and semantic components within the text, finding lexical and syntactical relations that unveil ways in which words and phrases create, influence, shape, and manipulate meaning to represent or misrepresent concepts, social events and intentions in order to influence the minds of the readers, thus transforming their identities. For instance, in the next excerpt, *Command of English as a foreign language* (MEN 2006a, p. 55), this analysis evidences the relationship that the word *English* has, with the title of the section as well as with the whole section to form and transform meaning. Then, the analysis recognizes elements which were included in representation of others that had been excluded and determines which ones were given the greater prominence seeking to reveal the intentions behind these practices as illustrated by Fairclough (2003). For instance, the excerpt below shows how actors are being omitted and exposes the prominence given to English and English users over all other languages.

> It is a given that English is the most widespread **language–it is calculated** that it is spoken by about *1,400 million people out* of which only a third of that number are native speakers[1]. (MEN, 2006a, p. 55)

As such, the analysis identifies discursive strategies such as nominalization, prominence, generalization, and re-contextualization in order to recognize identity-

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1   All data excerpts were translated from Spanish into English by the author. Emphasis in data excerpts has been added by the researcher to aid the analysis.

forming discourses within the paradigm of English language teaching in Colombia. In addition, it attempts to ascertain the scope, power, and resonance of such discourses within the text as proposed by Fairclough (2005). That is to say, as Fairclough (2005) suggests, that some structures of this text are formed, produced, reproduced and transformed to shape identities through the implementation of strategies and that these strategies are, in turn, elaborated in and through discourse.

Subsequently, a second level of analysis, called inter-textual analysis, examines the relationships between the text object of study and other texts such as policy-documents and also includes other voices in a discursive framework to complement, validate, and support the assumptions and assertions that emerged from the intra-textual analysis. In brief, it could be said that this analysis followed five steps. First, an extensive exploration of literature on identity, discourse, power, and control to clarify and understand concepts; second, numerous detailed readings of the data to gain a general understanding of the text; third, a meticulous analysis of vocabulary and sentence use within the text to unveil ways and strategies in which content was being produced, handled, manipulated and presented; fourth, an extensive search for other sources to confront or complement the assumptions; and finally, a categorization of findings. The intra-textual analysis unveiled themes and patterns to characterize and categorize the issues surrounding discourses about bilingualism in policy making and the inter-textual analysis aided the validation of the assertions made about the document.

Findings

Upon a close examination, the document Education: Vision 2019 recurrently employs words, expressions, and associations to form and transform meaning. These usages encompass three main discursive themes: being bilingual, being successful and being Colombian. These themes comprise the identity-forming content found in the document; however, only the first two categories will be presented in this report due to text-length constraints.

Discourses about Being Bilingual

Education: Vision 2019 makes reference to the need to speak another language in addition to Spanish in Colombia. In order to achieve that goal, government agencies like the MEN have created programs that are being categorized under labels of bilingualism. In addition to this document, many documents with similar aims have been published or sponsored by the MEN such as *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo Educativo 2006-2010* (National Plan for Educational Development, MEN, 2007), and *Plan Nacional de Bilingüismo* (National Bilingualism Plan, MEN, 2004). Herein, there are affiliations to beliefs, ideas, choices, interests in, and concepts of what bilingualism and bilingual education should be. It is therefore important to examine not only what is understood by "being bilingual" in Colombia today, but also, how government institutions wish it to be understood and why.

On the one hand, Grosjean (1992, as cited in Cenoz & Genesee, 1998) depicts bilingual individuals as, "[…] fully proficient speakers who have specific configurations of linguistic competencies that reflect, in part, unique interactions of the languages they know" (p. 18). On the other hand, Escobar and Gómez (2010) explain language as non-standard, culturally mediated, and identity bound: Therefore, being bilingual involves different experiences, contexts, processes, languages, and socio-historical backgrounds.

In this document, however, "being bilingual" is portrayed in general terms as the speaking of English alone. Hence, it is not only that people thoughtlessly understand bilingualism as speaking English, but rather, "the British Council has worked on a

campaign to spread the use of English around the world since the early years of the 20ᵗʰ century" (Phillipson, 1992, 2000, as cited in Guerrero 2008, p. 28) and this redefinition of the concept strategically suits this purpose by gradually distorting the vision of bilingualism in order to pursue the Council's own interests. In this way, Education: Vision 2019 employs a discursive strategy that Fairclough (2003) calls exclusion, inclusion, and prominence. This strategy suggests that the author purposefully composes a text from a representative point of view in which some elements are distorted by being included, excluded, misrepresented and/or deliberately given greater salience. This strategy is visible even in the headings of sections of the document Education: Vision 2019, since one heading bears the title: "Command of **English** as a foreign language" (MEN, 2006a, p. 55) wherein the author implies that by including the word English, being bilingual then is equivalent to speaking English and English alone, thereby placing all other languages in the background. The word *English* in the heading of the document section changes the meaning of the whole sentence and the whole section of the document because now English is representing the concept of foreign languages, thus endorsing the teaching of English while excluding all other languages. In addition, the discourses used in the Colombian National Plan of Bilingualism uniquely validate English in the Plan's practices, policies, standards and so forth. As such and drawing from Guerrero's (2008) study, discursive strategies are employed by these two organizations to preserve structures and protect interests.

Furthermore, this document employs a discursive strategy that Fairclough (2003) calls Nominalization: The actors are "backgrounded" or completely omitted in an attempt to justify the exclusive recognition of English as a foreign language for the national plan of bilingualism endorsed by the Ministry of Education. It states that English was adopted as the

foreign language because it is the language most widely spoken and that it is the language of science and trade. However, the article fails to make reference to the source this information was taken from or the processes undertaken in order to arrive at these conclusions:

> Through law 115 of 1994 and the recently implemented National Bilingualism plan it is sought to turn this skill into a skill for all. Given that English is the **language most widely spread–it is calculated** that it is spoken by about 1,400 million people out of which only a third of that amount are native speakers. And because it is the trade language of science and technology and the language of international business, the program has focused on promoting its teaching in educational institutions at all levels. (MEN, 2006a, p. 55)

How English is the most widely spoken language and who calculates how many people speak it is deliberately left unsaid. Similarly, the tendency to misinform, to word things advantageously, to create and obfuscate social, political, economic and educational "realities" spreads out into all Colombian contexts. Should Colombians have better language and academic skills, they would be able to better understand and react to these, and many other, discursive strategies. However, the document delineates three main plans to improve the quality and competitiveness of the country. The first of the three programs is the implementation of technology in teaching procedures. The second program addresses the spreading of English as a foreign language in the Colombian education system. The third program addresses the implementation of components in the curriculum to develop general labor skills (pp. 49-61). And as we see, there is neither a plan that contemplates Spanish language teaching, or minority language community education, nor a plan directed toward teaching contents and core disciplines which would allow a student to gain a holistic understanding of his or her physical and social surroundings and realities.

Although, embracing diversity is one of the MEN's mottos, the document unveils a clear and strong intention of implementing and enforcing standards that reflect a "homogeneous" form of British English.

> The English **standards**, created by the Ministry of Education based on the **Common European Framework** make explicit delineation of the skills the students must develop to understand and be understood **in the English language**. Adopting a **common reference point** with other countries will allow Colombia to see its advances in relation to other nations and to introduce **international parameters** to the local context. (MEN, 2006a, p. 57)

Linguistically speaking, there are actually many varieties of any language which offer speakers or writers specific features by which they can be recognized and positioned in society, as Hawkins (2004) proposes, and which means that accent, dialect and general language selection are regionally generated and determined; for example, American English is different from British English and there are also many other variations within. The paragraph above sets the Common European Framework as the common reference point and delineates it as the correct set of international parameters to follow; a standard not only to be compared to, but also to measure communicative performance within Colombia.

> **Measuring** was done taking as a **reference point** the **level scale** from the **Common European Framework** for **English** as a foreign language. This Framework, **resulting** from **ten years** of **research**, privilege skills that allow oral and written communication in different contexts and **establish** the **performance levels language users must reach**. (MEN, 2006a, p. 55)

These lines explicitly state that the basis for measuring bilingualism in the "Bilingual Colombia" program is the CEF. For the Ministry of Education, "Bilingualism" means speakers with standardized configurations that reflect homogenized interactions, globally "measurable and comparable" to the processes and achievements of other learners under completely different conditions.

In direct opposition to this association, Escobar and Gómez (2010) in their investigation into the identity, language and thought of the Nasa people of Colombia encountered that language is made in and about a specific territory and its particular characteristics. That is, in identity constitution, language and territory are not isolated from one another, but rather are in direct connection constructing each other. That is, community creates language about its life and its territory while language, in turn, creates conditions for community life by opening communication channels for cohesion and membership through which members find and strive together the common interests specific to that community. In Colombia, foreign language standards and procedures are being adopted and implemented while disregarding their social and cognitive impact. Ayala and Álvarez (2005), for example, tell us about the considerations that were taken into account for the elaboration and implementation of the Common European Framework of references for foreign language teaching in Europe. One aspect particularly evident was the rather unique geographical condition of European countries: Many neighbouring countries have diverse language backgrounds, and thus, struggle to communicate with each other and achieve commercial and cultural trade.

This social condition differs from Colombia's geographical characteristics where all neighbouring countries have Spanish as their official language with the exception of Brazil, which deems Portuguese as its official language. Language diversity is found within Colombia where there are indigenous languages and foreign languages spoken by different communities of people who form the nation and who have great needs for education and general linguistic rights to achieve full membership as citizens of country. As Pardo (2007) informs us, within Colombia there exist 65 indigenous languages from 14 linguistic families as well as two Creoles, English, Colombian

sign language, Arabic, Hebrew, Korean and Chinese. Therefore, we can infer that the MEN's vision on bilingualism and bilingual education does not embrace actual Colombian diversity, neither does it consider the different socio-political and cultural conditions and needs that are present in the nation, including asymmetrical access to education.

On the other hand, the word *Dominar* in MEN (2006a) means having a full command of the language and conveys a very high expectation by placing explicit emphasis on the proficiency level that Colombian students should attain irrespective of the conditions provided. "Having a full command of a foreign language represents a comparative advantage, an attribute for the people in their competence and competiveness" (p. 55).

In Colombia, most political, academic and social discursive acts take place in Spanish; therefore, Colombian citizens are in great need of improving their language skills to become better communicators in Spanish first and to understand the different natures and purposes of all of these discourses before which they are often unable to react. However, for the Ministry of Education being bilingual means holding no regard for Colombians' first language (L1). The document mentions three plans to improve educational quality in Colombia: implementation of computer information systems and increased technology in education, command of the English language, and general labor skills. The document is composed of sixty two pages, not one of which is devoted to strategies for the improvement of Spanish either as the second language of indigenous groups or as the official language of Colombia.

Uneven English education conditions have always been an issue in Colombian schooling as the document acknowledges.

> **Traditionally**, **attaining a full command of a foreign language** has been a **privilege** of just a **few people**, almost always from **high socioeconomic status**. The law 115 issued in 1994 and the

recent implementation of the national bilingualism plan seeks to make this skill available for all. (MEN, 2006a, p. 55)

Having a command of English is associated with word privilege and goes back to the past with the word traditionally being a luxury for some and a problem for others. This inequality is now being resolved and will one day belong only in history books. However, if we take a look at the dynamics of education today, we can observe that schools are categorized according to their English teaching levels and performance into "bilingual schools" and "schools that offer intensive English." The former suggests that even the government acknowledges different levels of access to English language education.

In short, the MEN has published and sponsored documents that gradually and strategically distort the concept of bilingualism in Colombia. In the document Education: Vision 2019 the MEN has misrepresented the concept of bilingualism in the following three ways: (1) it defines bilingualism as the speaking of English, thereby backgrounding all Colombian native languages (Spanish included); (2) it attempts to homogenize by reducing recognition of language ability to one arbitrary standardized form and by adopting rigid teaching models that are culturally insensitive at best and irrelevant at worst; and (3) it falsely claims to equally provide opportunities of access to this form of bilingual education to all citizens of the nation. In addition, through this document the MEN also rendered associations between the concept of bilingualism and the concept of success, which will be characterized in the next category.

Discourses about Being Successful

Being academically, professionally, and socially successful are salient themes of the document Education: Vision 2019 as well as in other texts regarding Colombia's bilingualism plan and the teaching of English in general. Therefore, this study attempts to identify,

describe and explain the instances, ways, and strategies in which the concept of success is conveyed. As such, it is claimed that there is an erroneous association between speaking English as a second language and succeeding academically, professionally, and/or socially. Guerrero (2008) suggests that there are individual, institutional, or foreign interests behind such discourses and, as Weber (1978) puts it, every system of authority attempts to establish and cultivate beliefs in its legitimacy. Here, the concept of success is used to underpin the implementation of the Colombian Bilingual Plan as conceived by the Ministry of Education.

Initially, speaking English is associated with academic success in the document when it is mentioned as one of the three strategies set forth to achieve academic improvement in national school curriculum. The introductory heading for these three programs reads:

> Three **strategic programs** to **improve** the **quality** and **competitiveness** of the people and the country (MEN, 2006a, p. 49)

Similarly, the document fosters other associations with the concept of success.

> Being able to communicate in a foreign language is an **indispensable** skill in today's world. It not only **makes** academic and professional **mobility possible** for people, but is the **basis** upon which society's **competitive capacity** is constructed as well as a **tool** to **open doors** to new cultures and new experiences and, as such, **acquire knowledge** that would have been out of reach otherwise. Having a full command of a foreign language **represents a comparative advantage**, a trait of **competence** and **competitiveness**. (MEN, 2006a, p. 55)

This paragraph suggests that being able to communicate in a foreign language (English) is an essential skill that represents the means to academic and professional mobility, and the lack thereof could cause knowledge to slip away and stay out of our reach. The author is overemphasizing the importance of English by giving it prominence over any other language or knowledge and attributing "unique"

characteristics to it that are, by no means, exclusive or specific to that particular language, given that knowledge can slip away as well as be constituted in any language.

Furthermore, "Being able to communicate in a foreign language is an indispensable skill in today's world" evokes the idea of functionality in the modern world. On the one hand, we now know that when the document mentions foreign language, it is referring specifically to English. So we can then understand the intended meaning of this expression as *speaking English is an indispensable skill in today's world*. On the other hand, the expression "today's world" encapsulates all contexts and conditions of the world into one with the characteristics that are valid and positive in their eyes. For instance, the MEN depicts the world as globalized, cosmopolitan, uniformed, technology-driven, and homogeneously structured where there are limitless evenly-distributed opportunities and cyclical dynamics of power and control. It is imperative to understand that today's world has myriad settings with unique conditions and that it is not all an English-speaking cosmopolitan business world mediated by computerized technology. There are other paradigms that may be rural or different in any other way, but essential for the social and economic sustainability of any nation nonetheless. Fairclough (2003) calls this discursive strategy "representations as re-contextualization" because it involves transferring a specific reality from a given place to another with completely different characteristics to project it as true and relevant and it is misrepresenting the concept of success as being present only in the city life of technological development.

Even further, the term 'mobility' has different connotations from which its meaning is derived. In a geographical sense, for example, it may refer to the need of Europeans to move around the continent for work, school and other purposes. In the academic sense, mobility may refer to having a widely accepted

schooling within the continent. An individual may have studied his or her first year of university in France and if he or she wanted to or had to move to the Netherlands, this school year could be accepted for the purpose of continuing his or her education. On the professional level, mobility may refer to the possibility of advancing, progressing, and climbing the socio-economic ladder within professional or academic fields. However, this term is used in the document in the following way:

> It not only makes **academic** and **professional mobility possible** for people, but it is the **basis** on which **society's competitive capacity is constructed** as well as a **tool** to **open doors** to new cultures and new experiences and thereby **acquire knowledge** that would be **out** of our **reach** otherwise. (MEN, 2006a, p. 55)

None of the three characteristics of mobility mentioned above is applicable to the Colombian context. Firstly, moving from country to country for work or school purposes is not very common unless people are close to the borders and even in such cases, it would not represent a need to speak another language; and secondly, professionally speaking, it is hard for someone to be the company's doorman today and advance to the managerial ranks of the company tomorrow simply through the acquisition of language skills. Conditions are not favorable for all of these types of mobility to take place in Colombia. Speaking specifically about the English language, let us take as an example the role of the Medellin metropolitan police force during the Inter-American Development Bank Conference in 2009 in Medellin and the Cartagena metropolitan police force in the week leading up to Easter Sunday (Castro, 2010). In these cases, policemen and policewomen received English language instruction to serve the needs of the Anglophone tourists.

When these cases occur, English language learning is not providing any type of mobility; instead, the role of the police figure is being belittled to perform the duties of tourist guides and serve tourists from other countries.

In addition, where the document says "Speaking English is the basis upon which society's competitive capacity is constructed", the MEN is narrowing society and social validity to the English-speaking world. So, achieving social status requires the ability to speak English just as being socially successful requires the same. However, when observing reality closely, English is learned and taught in a dynamic of servitude and subjugation through obeying foreign standards, catering to others' interests, imitating, and replicating others' values rather than as a way of existing in the world under ones' own terms. The next excerpt unveils another view held about success in relation to financial power:

> **Traditionally**, attaining a full command of a **foreign language** has been a **privilege** of just a few people, almost always from a **high socioeconomic** status. Law 115 issued in 1994 and the recent implementation of the national bilingualism plan seeks to make this skill **available for all**. (MEN, 2006a, p. 55)

English is here being historically associated with Colombia's highest social classes, and thus, to purchasing power. So what the text is saying is that now, thanks to the program, success will be imparted to all regardless of their purchasing power. Sadly, in Colombia there are no conditions of equality, especially in the area of English language education, because to obtain equality requires financial investment in teachers' professional development and in physical and environmental resources such as good school facilities, books, media, and other materials. Economic conditions are very different from one social stratum to another and thus educational results also differ. The subsequent quote makes yet another point about the view of success held by the author:

> In Colombia only a **very small minority** (less than 1% of the population) reaches a good enough proficiency level to understand and write diverse texts, communicate fluently and

function socially and **professionally** in the **English** language. (MEN, 2006a, p. 55)

This passage highlights that only a very small portion of the Colombian population is able to function socially in English. However, Colombia has very few contexts in which English is spoken. While there are some micro-contexts in schools and organizations, if we wanted to talk about an English-speaking context in Colombia, we would be able to name only the San Andrés and Providencia Islands. There is not only any real need to function socially in English in Colombia but it is also tremendously difficult to find English-speaking contexts in the country.

In brief, discourses have been adopted and adapted by the MEN to draw false and fallacious connections between the concepts of success and bilingualism in three specific ways. First, the document suggests that the learning of English embodies the concept of success disregarding unequal socio-economic realities of the country. Second, it implies that knowledge construction and thus academic success is only possible through the speaking of English. Third, it suggests that academic, professional, and social mobility is experienced in direct relation to English proficiency and that everybody is provided with equal access to learning and, consequently, equal mobility. These fallacies belie the meaning of being Colombian leading us thereby to characterize the different connotations about it given by the MEN in another category entitled "Discourses about Being Colombian", which is not presented here due to text length constraints.

Conclusions

Many affiliations to interests, ideologies, values, knowledge, and intentions, as well as several ways of understanding and conveying the relationships between the individual and the English language

(identities) were unveiled in the discourses of the document Education: Vision 2019. Thus, they are categorized and characterized into three main identity-forming discourses: discourses about being bilingual, being successful, and being Colombian, although only the first two are addressed in detail in this work. Additionally, discursive strategies such as nominalization, re-contextualization, over-generalization, prominence, etc. were made evident throughout the analysis of the document highlighting how some things were strategically omitted while others were deliberately employed to persuade, dissimulate, and manipulate their audience in pursuit of particular interests.

The Colombian Ministry of Education is progressively and strategically reducing the concept of being bilingual from any of a number of languages to considering only English and Spanish, leaving aside other Colombian languages and transforming the Colombian language paradigm into a form of English "monolingualism." These distortions of the concept can have negative implications in cognitive, cultural, linguistic and identity interrelationships. In other words, standardization, homogenization, and simplification of the notion of language are being fostered in the quest for power and control, consequently overthrowing the value of local knowledge, difference and diversity.

These processes use marketing strategies wherein the spread of English is promoted by assigning it false characteristics and properties: English becomes a good or a product that needs to be produced massively through standardized procedures. All of this is causing our educational system to deteriorate by spreading socio-cultural fallacies and turning education into a marketplace that sells knowledge to the highest bidder, excluding those who do not have the resources to bid or to bid high enough.

Canagarajah (2005) relies heavily on discourse analysis to highlight the various strategies used to

dominate and undermine different identities: For example, local knowledge is often made to appear archaic, silly or untrustworthy. In the same way, one language can be shown as the modern language of development while others are projected as primitive and ignorance-inducing depending on the purpose sought. The Ministry of Education projects English as the modern language of development and as the only language through which knowledge construction can take place, thus depicting it as the language of success.

In order to prioritize the foreign over the local, the MEN has adopted discourses and taken cues from foreign sources. For example, it has translated a reality from a faraway context to the Colombian one with its uncritical implementation of the Common European Framework, which was put into practice in Europe as the result of ten years of study *in* the European context *for* the European context and considering the geographical and linguistic necessities and characteristics of the European continent. No such studies of linguistic context and characteristics were executed in Colombia.

Consequently, English language teaching policies in Colombia are rife with discursive practices that systematically shape the identities of those they address to strategically introduce procedures which seek to benefit specific social groups, thus broadening the gap between social groups by providing unequal and disingenuous opportunities rather than making appropriate language education truly available to all, as it falsely purports to do.

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About the Author

Wilder Yesid Escobar Alméciga holds a master's degree in applied linguistics to TEFL from Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas (Colombia). He is an assistant professor at the Universidad El Bosque (Colombia) and his research interest is in discourse analysis. He is currently a member of the research group "Educación Universitaria Unbosque."