

The multilingual turn in Sociolinguistics: What use is it to educators?

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Outline

- Vanuatu – a context for multilingual education
- A quick sketch of the ‘multilingual turn’ in Sociolinguistics and what this **could** mean for educators
- My own experiences trying to work with these new frames of reference,
 - when analysing my data from two school communities in Vanuatu
 - when sharing findings with teachers from my study
 - when talking to policymakers (Ministry of Education, Teachers College, Curriculum Unit) about my research

Vanuatu as a linguistically diverse context: Implications for education

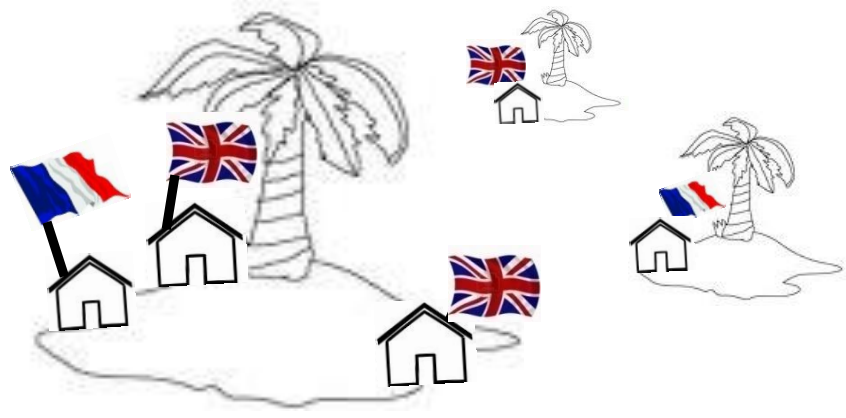
(Population: 240,000)

Languages:

- 100+ Austronesian languages
 - Bislama (National variety of the English-based Melanesian Pidgin)
 - English
 - French
- (former colonial languages)



1906 - 1980
Colonial LPP as
competition



1906 - 1980
Colonial LPP as
competition



1980
Post-colonial LPP
as compromise

English-
medium

French-
medium



A dual submersion model

1906 - 1980
Colonial LPP as
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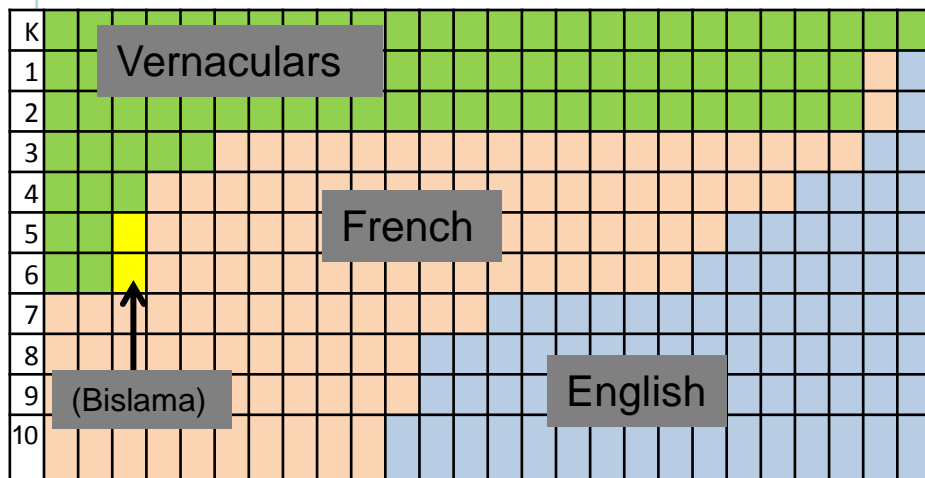
English-
medium

French-
medium

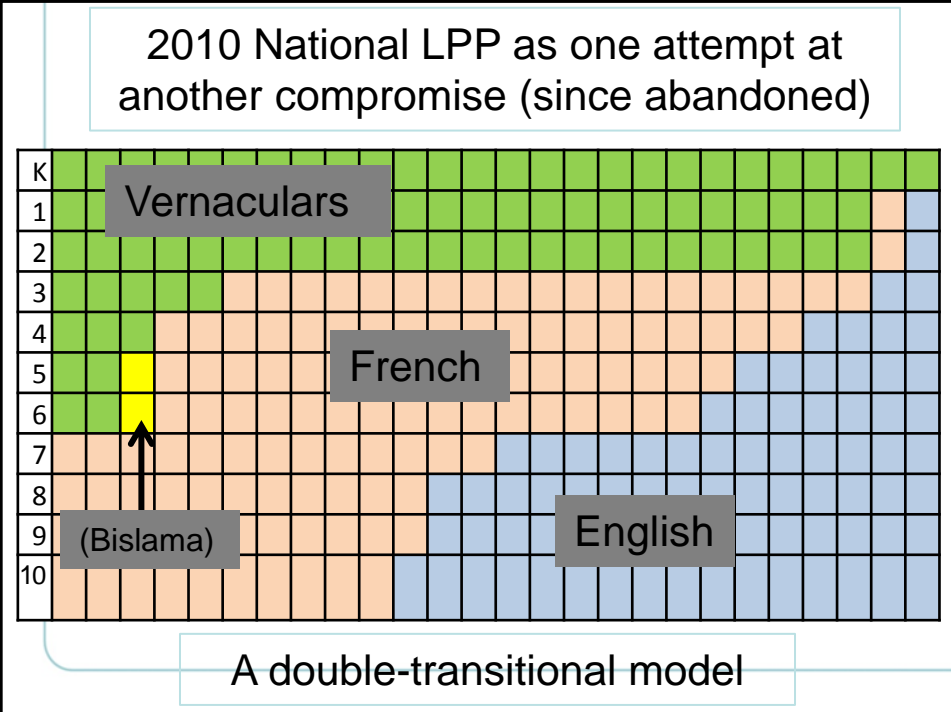
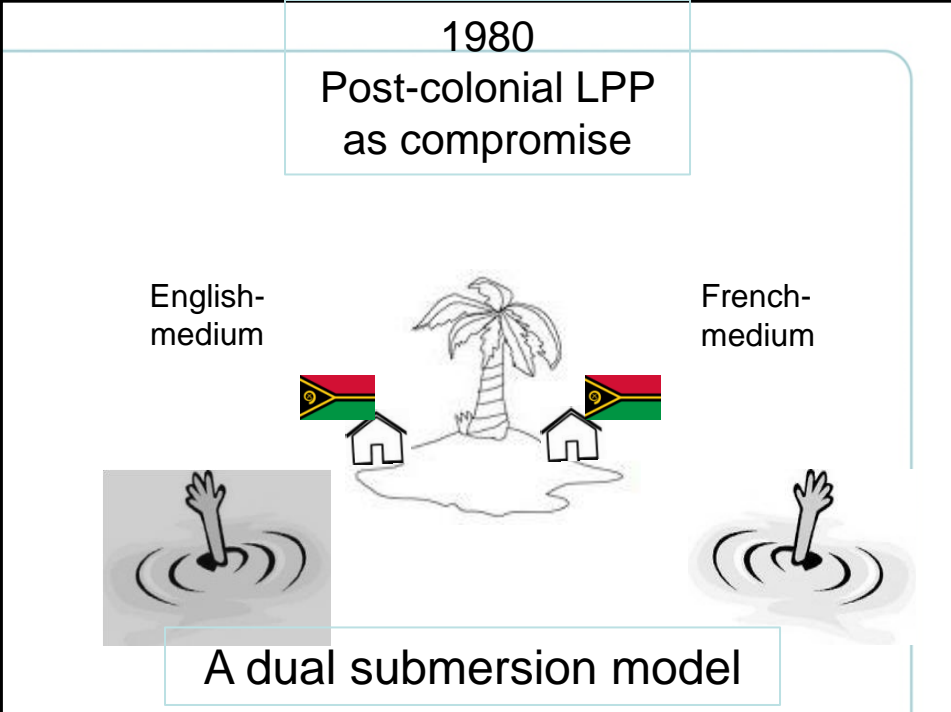
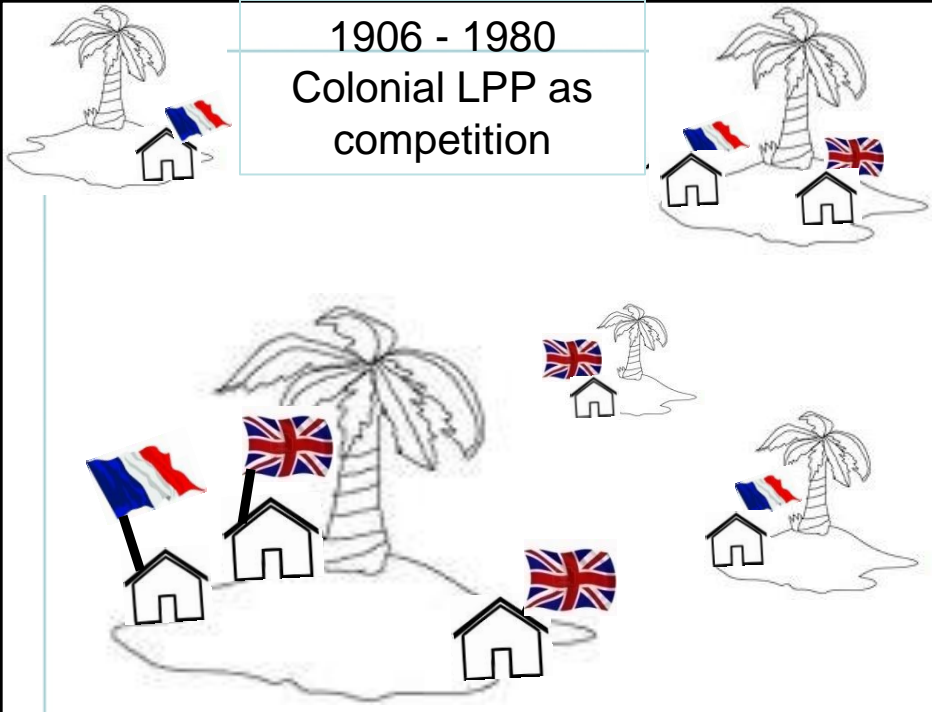


A dual submersion model

2010 National LPP as one attempt at
another compromise (since abandoned)



A double-transitional model



2012 The latest ...

	ANGLOPHONE STREAM	FRANCOPHONE STREAM		
Year 1	Vernacular (including Bislama)			
Year 2				
Year 3				
Year 4	English medium	French medium		
Year 5				
Year 6				
Year 7				
Year 8			+ French as a foreign language	+ English as a foreign language
Year 9				
Year 10				

How languages are conceptualised within these policy debates

- Each language allotted its own space on the timetable
- One language at a time
- Languages compared in terms of their suitability for education
- Some languages suppressed to make room for others
- “*Multiple monolingualisms*” (Heugh, 2003; Banda, 2009), rather than *multilingualism*

The ‘multilingual turn’ in Sociolinguistics

Ongoing revision of fundamental ideas about

(a) Language(s)

(b) Language groups and speakers

(c) Multilingualism

“Rather than working with homogeneity, stability and boundedness as the starting assumptions, mobility, mixing, political dynamics and historical embedding are now central concerns” (Blommaert & Rampton (2012, pp.9-10)

What has changed?

1. the nature of linguistic diversity, due to globalization, changing patterns of migration, and different media and technologies of communication

AND

2. the realisation that categories such as 'language', 'multilingualism', and so on have never adequately captured the complex reality of language use

(HOW MUCH OF THIS IS REALLY NEWS TO
SPEAKERS OF PACIFIC LANGUAGES?)

The deployment of *linguistic features*, rather than *languages*

“‘Languages’ are abstractions, they are sociocultural or ideological constructions which match real-life use of language poorly. This means that sociolinguistics – the study of language as a social phenomenon - must work at another level of analysis with real-life language use. ... We use the level of (linguistic) features as the basis for understanding language use, and we claim that features are socioculturally associated with ‘languages’”.
(Jørgensen, et al 2011, p.23)

A more flexible multilingualism, characterised by:

- a focus on fluidity and flexibility,
- the prioritisation of language *use* rather than of abstract, idealised language models,
- and the understanding that we draw on whatever linguistic (and non-linguistic) resources are available to us, regardless of which 'language' they are traditionally associated with.

Key question

Can rethinking 'multilingualism' as the flexible use of multiple linguistic resources help me:

- a) analyse my data with relevant implications for education policy?
- b) discuss my findings with teachers from the study?
- c) discuss my findings with 'official' policymakers?

A brief example of how
this 'rethinking' helped
me analyse my data

'Good night' (North-East Ambae)



F: Bongarea tufala

'Good night' (French)



R: Nah mas talem bon nuit nomo nao.
French gal!

S: Awo, mi jalus long yu yu save Franis.

F: Honest. Yu jalus blong smol Franis nomo.
Lukaot i no naf!

S: Nah be yu save Franis. Yu intres long
hem. Yu fit.



No but you know French.
You're interested in it.

A summary of conclusions from the study

The official line:

- English and French are valued equally, and there is no way that one will be dropped; All other languages (but particularly Bislama) are considered unsuitable for education, even though their utility is often acknowledged in this context

Unofficially:

- Knowing a language does not mean knowing *all of a* language (minimal 'displays' are sometimes enough);
- There is space for the resources of multiple languages to be used together, even in the classroom, if the focus can be shifted to *learning*, rather than *language competence*;
- Using multiple linguistic resources in school does not prevent the effective teaching of English/French.

Attempt 1: Showing that multiple linguistic resources can work together in an academic context

T: The first style that Hau'ofa uses is oral story telling. And oral story telling hem i sem mak nomo olsem yumi wanem yumi kolem kastom stori.

S: Dukuni

T: Dukuni. Dukuni long lanwis blong yumi. Dukuni. Dukuni tavohi dave dam vano dam togarorongo, tomue morovo serigihi vataha revirevi dam vano dave da maturu rave ram veve na dukuni. Dukuni hi a style hi Hau'ofa mo yusum? I sem mak nomo olsem stael we yumi stap yusum long=

S: = Stori

T: Stori blong yumi. Ale ahm dukuni ngerehi ram tangaloi ram veve ram stori oli stori out loud olsem ale yumi, o yumi olsem ol man we yumi stap long lesen nao ol audiences. Be Hau'ofa hem i. Uses. Hem i yusum same particular style.

S: Ah audience ngwere tangaloi ram toka ram rorotagi? =

T: =Ram rorotagi ale Hau'ofa nge mo. Oli kolem oral story telling from se Hau'ofa i yusum stael ia olsem oral story telling ia nao. Hem i oral oli olsem talem out loud. Okay stori ia hem i olsem se particular style we Hau'ofa i yusum ia? It's just as if hem i stap talem aot stori out loud to=

S: =Evriwan

T: Yes to one audience olsem



What did the teacher herself say about this extract?

- “This was outside class so it was okay. If I explained in English outside class, it would be odd. She’s from my village.”
- “If I use too much Bislama or *Lanwis* in the classroom, they’ll become competent in the wrong language – a problem in the exams.”
- “It’s very unusual to use my language, Bislama and English at the same time like this. I normally use one at a time.”

(Attempt 2: Discussion group, August 2014,
with teachers who had participated in my 2011 research)

Showing that L2-only doesn't necessarily require much L2

The blozz plimped haggily to the
wembong

How little language we need in order to
survive in the L2 medium classroom.

How much we need in order to **succeed**.

Phloem cells are living cells

T: Phloem cells are?

Ss: Living cells

T: They are not?

Ss: Lignified

- It seems that students understand. Until we see their notes:
- “Phloem cells are living cells. Phloem has cellulose (not lignified) cell walls.”
- They can provide the answers from their notes, but we don’t know whether they really understand.

Who does most of the talking? What happens when the students don't give an answer?

T: What can you see in the three pictures?

S1: Old people

S2: Small children

S3: People working

T: How do these pictures relate to our topic?

(SILENCE)

T: What is our topic?

Ss: Dependency ratios

T: Do these pictures show something about dependency ratios?

Ss: Yes

T: What do they show us?

(SILENCE)

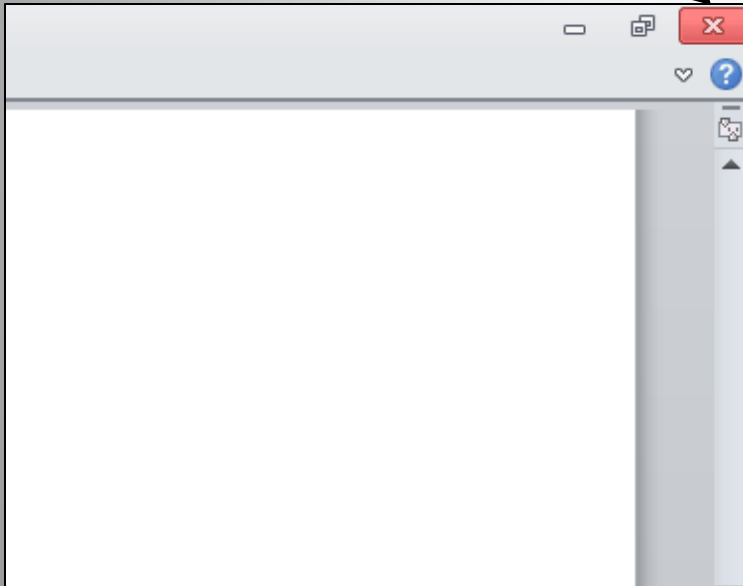
T: Which people are dependent on others?

Ss: Old people and children

T: Who provides for them?

What happens in the exam?

Q: What is the function of the part marked on the diagram?



A: *“When you are not agree with that something that you are doing you may move a mouse to it and it may come to empty space again”*

The student understands the concept perfectly.

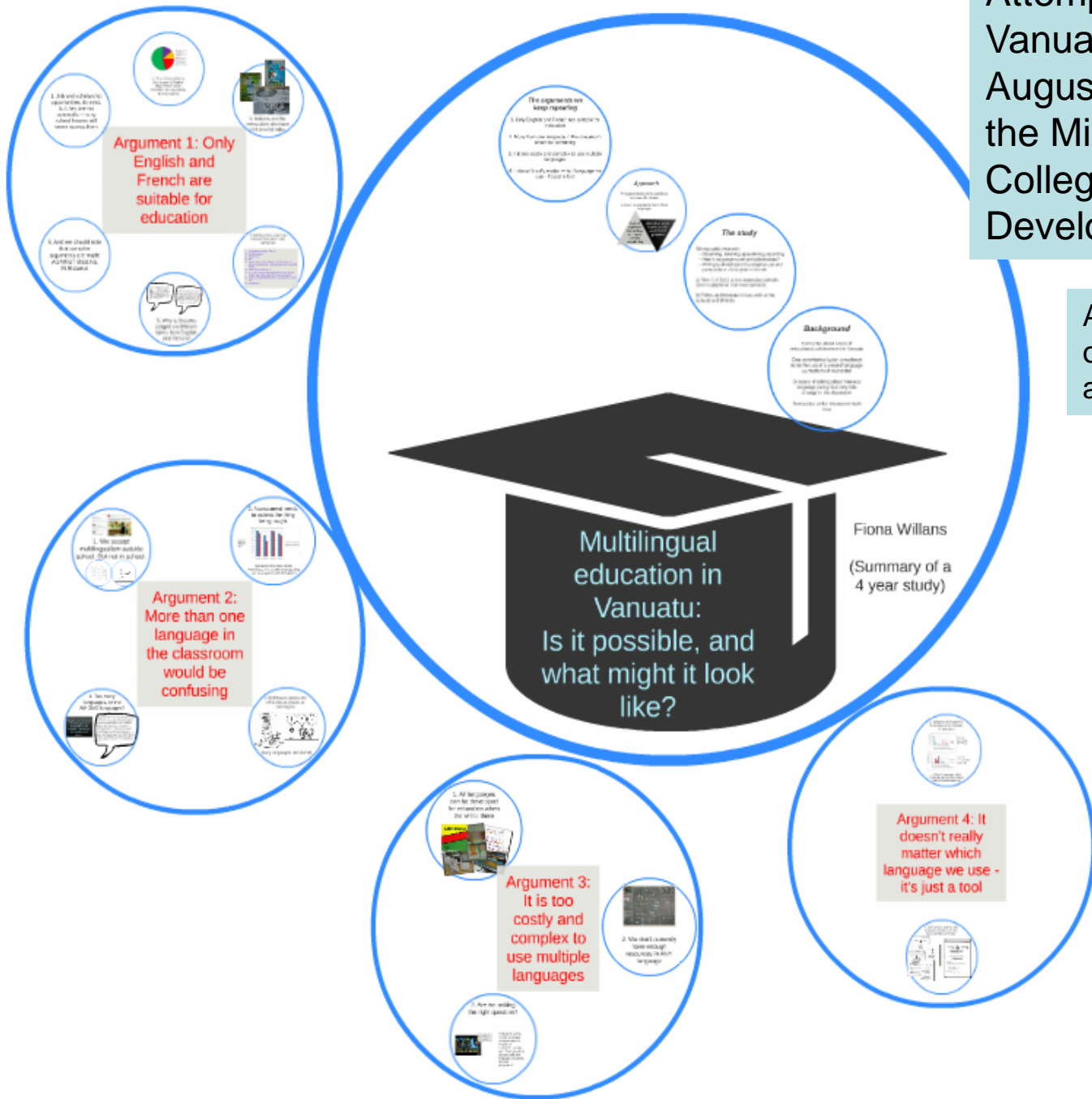
But the student struggles to explain the concept in English and the answer is marked incorrect.

Does this help?

- Using classroom data helps show that ‘L2 only’ does not necessarily mean much L2 is actually used (particularly by the students);
- So it enables teachers to rethink some of the assumptions underlying school rules and teacher training;
- However, it doesn’t get us past the “*but they should be better at L2*” argument.

Attempt 3: Presentation at Vanuatu Ministry of Education, August 2014 (Attendees from the Ministry, the Teachers College and the Curriculum Development Unit)

Attempting to tackle each of the deep-rooted L2-only arguments in turn



Feedback from the presentation

Individual counter-arguments all accepted,

- e.g. relief from teacher trainers that it's okay to do what they're doing anyway (advising teachers to use L1 alongside L2)
- even 100% agreement that Bislama is suitable for education (including from one participant who had argued vehemently against it in an interview)

BUT each counter-argument was quickly rebutted by one of the other arguments

Attempt 4: Recognising the complexity and the interconnectedness of the whole, rather than individual arguments

Opening up space for multilingual education in Vanuatu: Challenging the web of myths

• But multilingualism works JUST FINE in 'non-school learning events' – What is the difference?

• People seem to want English AND French – Clearly more than one language IS okay.

• We have empirical evidence that schools are far from monolingual – it's not a local PROBLEM but a wider institutional REALITY

• But how much knowledge can students demonstrate in L2? What are tests testing?

• There are viable alternatives for internal assessment in particular – pragmatic solutions that depend on resources

• Even where tests remain monolingual, they can be prepared for multilingually

• But classrooms will not be as chaotic as imagined – Many languages are SHARED

• TEACHER TRAINING needs to provide teachers with techniques that will help them stay in control

• And profiting from students' lack of expertise in the LOLT as a way of retaining teacher control can't be right! Students need to be able to ENGAGE

• But international evidence shows that this simply doesn't happen without EXPLICIT FL teaching

• Vanuatu data shows low levels of L2 – CHANGE is needed

• Classroom data shows that teachers do all the language work: Students have no INCENTIVE to master the LOLT

• But prioritising English/French over the LEARNING OF CONTENT will not bring any opportunities for individuals or society

• Statistics show that ONLY 14% of jobs ask for English and French (20% require English, 0.7% French)

• But outside school languages are used in non-formal education, business, etc. etc.

• Inside school, the languages have an instrumental potential for children UNDERSTANDING and PARTICIPATING

"Sasaha e vaha bulu na lao"
(Tolo, Guadalcanal)

Knowledge is like a cobweb. It only becomes knowledge through the connections.

How do we challenge this?

How do we challenge this?

How do we challenge this?

How do we challenge this?

How do we challenge this?

How do we challenge this?

How do we challenge this?

"Any language can be mastered and then used"

"English & French bring automatic opportunities (both = best)"

"The 106 vernaculars & dialects"

"to produce"

• But there are currently very few books in ANY language!

• Books that do exist are inadequate for L2 learners – the money could be BETTER spent

• Evidence from PNG shows that materials CAN

• But these languages are already used to discuss complex topics outside school – Corpus planning responds to NEED

• Invert the problem: Can SPEAKERS access sufficient linguistic resources for their PURPOSES? (rather than asking whether a language is sufficiently capable)

• Interviews enabled participants to express some complex negative views ABOUT Bislama, IN Bislama!

• And why is Bislama described as unstable, when English and French are described as ALIVE and constantly DEVELOPING?

• But CONTENT and LANGUAGE teaching are totally different

• With APPROPRIATE language teaching, English and French can still be learnt to a high standard

Summary

- I found that too much ‘rethinking’ can seem off-putting, but that people can be persuaded to ‘rethink’ practice if they have the opportunity to judge for themselves whether arguments are validated by their own data;
- Providing concrete *counter*-arguments seemed the best way to dislodge stubborn arguments;
- Keeping the ‘complex whole’ in focus is important, even while working on just one part of the whole;
- Evidence of what would work instead is obviously crucial, as well as challenging the status quo;
- If enough of this ‘rethinking’ can be done through a sideways approach (government-level, teacher training, in communities ...), change might become possible.

Tangkiu tumas
Vinaka vakalevu
Mahalo



All presentation materials are available at www.fionawillans.wordpress.com

References from the talk

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