Each of the four chapters in this section approaches minority language and the position of bi- and multilingual individuals in predominantly monolingual societies from the perspectives of social justice and law. David Corson’s work represents the most general theoretical perspective; that is, his inquiry is about how minority-language speakers should be fairly treated in a just society. Corson relies on a critical revision of John Rawls’s theory of justice and argues that a concept of social justice which is based exclusively on individual rights cannot address the rights of language minorities because language is communally owned by individuals. With some modifications of the original liberal theory, however, an emancipatory conception of social justice can be developed that allows communities to examine the rights and needs of language minorities through the lens of critical realism. Corson’s chapter outlines three fundamental principles that policymakers should follow in multilingual communities. These principles can govern social action that fosters language awareness, a realistic and critical way of combining “respect for the good of the individual with respect for the good of the social group” (p. 118). One important feature of Corson’s theorizing about social justice as related to language minorities is that his principles can be applied to “nonstandard language policy” in general without distinguishing between minority-language and “substandard” dialect or variety. Corson shares the view of those linguists’ who, following Labov, reject the stereotype that nonstandard varieties of language are incorrect. He maintains that current practices of ostracizing nonstandard speakers in schools are intolerant and discriminatory. These varieties deserve respect, like any other language, and their speakers also have a right to acquire the dominant-language variety in school.
Although both Juan F. Perea and Guadalupe Valdes examine similar, and even some identical court cases, these two chapters present the courtroom conflicts of bilingual individuals from two different perspectives. Perea, an expert of law, is frustrated with the court, state, and federal legislatures’ failure to provide equal protection for language minorities simply because the exclusion of bilingual jurors from jury duty, or the prohibition against using a minority language in the workplace, does not seem to violate any basic rights and is not suspected of discrimination as the law is currently interpreted. The reason judges fail to recognize instances of discrimination in these language-related cases is that society in general is hostile toward immigrants and minorities. If legal procedures will not change until society changes, educators can make a vital contribution to changing the current social climate, which seems to be the only way society can move from the currently hostile position to appreciating the linguistic resources of the United States and using law to support this heritage rather than squelch it.

Valdes reaches similar conclusions and also stresses the need for social change. The popular support that English Only advocates get in many states demonstrates that many in the United States look on multilingualism as un-American and view the growing immigrant population as a threat. Basically, argues Valdes, English Only is a symptom of anti-immigrant sentiments, and as such cannot be challenged simply by reasonable arguments about rights, justice, or the nature of language acquisition. Valdes is also certain that the cited court cases violate multi- and bilingual individuals’ civil rights, and society in general places a greater burden on bilingual individuals by forcing them not only to learn the dominant language, but also to eradicate or suppress their first language. This unfair practice is fostered by ignorance: monolingual individuals cannot understand the bi- or multilingual perspective; they do not see why, for example, it would be reasonable and just to pay more for someone’s bilingual services, or why it is odd to ask a bilingual individual to listen to what is said in one language only. Valdes also examines the potential benefits of making a case for linguistic human rights, as is done in international contexts, but concludes that language discrimination must take into account linguistic civil rights.
Finally, Randy H. Lee and David F. Marshall explore another aspect of English Only legislation, raising the question of when it is really worth going to law. As Molly Ivins pointed out, “the art of writing law so that it does precisely what it is supposed to do and does not do anything else has always been hard to come by” (qtd. on p. 172). Lee and Marshall cite many examples of ill-fated laws that actually created worse crises than those they were meant to remedy, and argue that making English the official language of the United States is a likely candidate for becoming such a counterproductive law. English is already the de facto official language in the United States, and the move to make it the de jure official language amounts to fixing a language policy that is not broken. After discussing what laws can and cannot do from a statutory perspective, Lee and Marshall enumerate seven unwanted and unanticipated consequences of English Only law that its proponents overlook.
In this essay, I try to offer a clear and accessible social justice framework for making language policy decisions in education and society, in particular for making key policy decisions related to the English Only debate in the United States. I begin with a critique of the rather individualist approach to justice offered by John Rawls that still dominates discussion about social justice in the United States. Then I contrast that approach with a “critically real” approach to judging social justice that is more respectful of minority-group interests and more closely linked to the way the world actually is. A critically real approach to social justice recognizes that diversity is part of the reality of the human condition. This is true for language diversity no less than other forms of diversity. Because human groups and individuals have distinctly different language interests, those differences often need to be addressed in different ways in public policy if social justice is to be served.

In the second and third sections of the chapter, I relate this approach to the English Only issue by dealing with two aspects of that issue:

- the importance, on social justice grounds, of providing bilingual education to minority-language students up to the middle years of childhood; or, at the very least, the importance of providing education that fully respects children’s first languages

- the importance, on social justice grounds, of designing fairer language policies in education for the users of nonstandard varieties of English
Social Justice

Social justice has to do with ideas about legitimacy, about fairness and impartiality, about welfare and mutual advantage, and about political and social consensus. The fair treatment of speakers of language varieties that are not the dominant dialect is one key concern of social justice theorists. Justice itself relates to the way that benefits and burdens are distributed, and is usually said to exist when people receive that to which they are entitled (Barry 1989). The question of who is entitled to decide which language varieties should be used in public domains in the United States is at the heart of the English Only debate.

In discussions of ethics and political philosophy in the United States over recent generations, the social justice ideas of John Rawls have been dominant. Rawls (1973, 1980, 1993) sees the individual as the starting point for any discussion about the criteria for a just society. The following paragraphs summarize Rawls’s theory, suggesting some of its weaknesses. Later I move to a more recent conception that modifies Rawls’s stark individualism. This theory gives prominence to the justice needs of social groups, alongside and sometimes even ahead of the needs of individuals. This critically real approach recognizes that people are inevitably shaped by society and culture, and that a conception of individualism that ignores this fact is an impoverished one because it misses seeing the way people really are.

I argue that considerable room must be made for this critically real approach in any discussion of social justice and language if we are to give sufficient recognition to the most obvious feature of language itself: its essential role in allowing and promoting communicative interaction between social groups of two or more people. My general point, then, in opposition to a starkly individualist account of justice, is this: If our aim is to provide, in education and society, language arrangements that are just ones, while also considering the rightful needs of individuals, then we must inevitably consider the needs of the group at the same time as the individual, since language in its literal sense is a feature of human collectivities. A language is a set of social conventions having value and meaning only when it develops over time from the interactional and communicative needs of social groups. As a
social institution itself, a language is not just an instrumental convenience made available by chance to the individuals who acquire it. Rather, it is the very means by which individual human beings are socialized and from which they develop a consciousness of themselves. This consciousness is a direct and unique reflection of the culture that comprises the many social, ethnic, class, and gender groups who share the language.

In promoting social justice in language policy matters, then, little can be done for the individual that does not begin with the group at the same time. And speakers of minority-language varieties are no less “language groups” than the different groups of majority-language speakers in a given setting.

*The Rawls Account of Social Justice and Some Canadian Accounts*

The basic idea to which Rawls is committed is also a cornerstone of ethics: no individual can be treated as a means to the ends of society. Working from this basic tenet, he sees social justice as the content of an agreement that rational people would reach under conditions that do not allow bargaining power to be translated into advantage. In other words, social justice decisions need to be made in an impartial way by decision makers who do not benefit unreasonably themselves by choosing as they do.

Under the terms of Rawls’s theory, proponents of English Only policies would have to support those policies even if they would be disadvantaged by them. These policymakers would try to work out what arrangements ought to exist and do this in a context free of self-interest and bias. They would decide what was just, after detaching themselves from their own interests and while adopting a standpoint of strict impartiality. Rawls calls this attempt at detachment a “veil of ignorance.”

One of the earliest expressions of this impartial approach to justice is the New Testament’s Golden Rule, which advises us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. And most of the world’s religions have a similar injunction. Yet even this cornerstone of beneficence from the world’s scriptures has a dark underside, as George Bernard Shaw cautions: Don’t do to others as you would have them do to you; their tastes might be differ-
ent. This is a wry twist to the rule, but there is more than humor in Shaw’s rider. He reminds us that we cannot easily see the world from the point of view of most other people because they are different from us, so we cannot easily make well-informed and fair decisions on behalf of those others in the neat way Rawls envisions.

In other words, it is usually difficult to determine in advance what fair treatment would be in any given context if one is not a participant in the discursive practices of that context and knowledgeable about all the cultural and historical influences that shape that context. This is especially true in matters of language policy, for which it is not easy to create a context free of self-interest and bias, because each of us is burdened with the bias of the language varieties we already possess, and few can be neutral in judging the interests of their own language variety’s speakers against the speakers of language varieties that are not their own. We cannot step outside the interests that our socialization into a language variety creates for us, because it is these very interests, and the similar interests of those who share our language, that we feel ourselves obliged to defend, even through the use of the same language.

Indeed, Rawls’s conception of the individual seems “unreal” because it sets the individual apart from the social being. Furby (1986) and Sandel (1982) argue that the individual in Rawls’s account lacks human sociality. Even in his later modifications of the theory, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the individual agents in Rawls’s account all display the attitudes and beliefs of men in modern market societies in a consistent and exclusive way. Moreover, he admits the practical limitations of his “well-ordered society”; it needs to be “a closed system” that has “no significant relations to other societies” (Rawls 1980, 526). This implies, of course, a society with no significant relations with other language speakers, where everyone has broadly the same goals, values, interests, and worldview.

For language policy issues, these are problematic aspects of a theory of justice because, as I have argued, language is a creation of social beings and has value for the individual largely in social interaction. Even the private language in which much of our thinking is conducted is fueled by social exchanges: To a real extent,
our very capacity to think depends on the many previous dialogues in which we have engaged. So the sense of a collective being who is produced and produces him- or herself through interaction within and across groups in a society or culture is missing in Rawls’s theory. Nor does his early work focus on the institutional relations that are part of the social being and which underlie economic classes (Nielsen 1978; Young 1981). Instead, he seems to see class inequality, and therefore cultural, gender, and linguistic inequality, as inevitable structures even in his ideal human social system.

In contrast, prominent liberal theories of social justice recently advanced in Canada have tried to incorporate aspects of a more collectivist ethic. Charles Taylor (1992) believes that a society with strong collectivist goals can still be liberal if it is capable of respecting diversity, especially diversity that includes those who might not share its common goals. For Taylor, the political search by Quebec for recognition of its distinctness as a society within Canada is a collective goal that can be allowed to override individual rights under certain circumstances. Taylor (1992) further suggests that the “rigidities of procedural liberalism may rapidly become impractical in tomorrow’s world” (61).

As critics of liberalism often observe, “what defines liberalism is its disregard for the context of choice, for the way that choices are situated in cultural communities” (Kymlicka 1989, 206). This usually translates into an active hostility by proponents of liberalism to minority rights, so that “schemes which single out minority cultures for special measures,” such as bilingual education programs, seem “irremediably unjust, a disguise for creating or maintaining racial or ethnic privilege” (4). As a liberal theorist himself, Will Kymlicka tries to rehabilitate liberalism as it is commonly interpreted, especially by addressing its failure to respond to people’s strong intuitions about the importance of cultural membership. In doing so, he also reexamines and questions the moral ontology of liberalism itself—its individualism and its taken-for-granted, naive, and uncritical egalitarianism. He argues that membership in a cultural or linguistic community has to be a relevant criterion for distributing the benefits and burdens which are the concern of a liberal theory of justice.
Critical Realism: An Emancipatory Conception of Social Justice

The prominent British philosopher of science Roy Bhaskar calls his emancipatory conception of discovery “critical realism” (Bhaskar 1986; Corson 1997). Unlike Rawls’s theory, this conception sees the needs of different groups as quite different needs that arise from different group interests, and which often require different forms of treatment. In other words, to treat people equally and fairly, we do not treat them as if they were all the same.

Critical realism is an ontology. It asks, what are the most basic things that exist in the social world; what are the things that need to be recognized in the search for justice, or in the search for knowledge about anything? Bhaskar shows that the most basic evidence we can have about the social world includes the reasons and accounts that relevant individuals offer to describe those things in the social world they value, or those things that oppress them.

Decision makers creating a policy need to consult the reasons and accounts of participants who have interests at stake in the decision. Policymakers do this early in the process, and they keep on doing it at every stage. In fact, the policymakers themselves change. They are different people as the policy comes closer to local settings because they need to be increasingly in touch with the reality of those settings. This implies an ordered, developmental approach to policymaking.

Briefly, this means devolving real decision-making power to those who are actually in touch with the things that oppress them or with the things that they value. For example, in multilingual settings, this decision making might include the following stages of increased devolution:

1. consulting at the wider system level (attending to the interests of those with a stake in the issue) to draw up any norms that could operate as principles across the system in an effort to increase the scope for optional use of any single minority language alongside English, and also alongside other minority languages
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2. consulting in devolved local settings to establish more local norms for allotting status to minority languages, critically accepting the norms already identified at system level as a necessary starting point, and making use of any grounds for compatibility that follow from both sets of norms

3. consulting (as often as necessary) in decision making within increasingly devolved local settings; establishing subnorms where needed to determine compatibility; and eventually, if necessary, compromising on incompatible issues

Throughout this process, compatible interests between language-minority groups provide the material for constructing overriding norms, while incompatible interests become the subject of compromise at more local levels (e.g., state, community, district, school, grade-level, classroom, individual student). The first norms, or principles, for policymakers to decide on are those that apply at the whole-system level. Following are some suggested principles for use in minority-language policymaking in education at the state or national level (Corson and Lemay 1996). To meet the type of diversity found in multilingual settings such as the United States, three policy principles seem necessary:

1. This principle guarantees the right of children to be educated whenever possible in the same variety of language that is learned at home or is valued most by the family. For instance, young speakers of Spanish or French as a first language would be taught through that first language as their vehicle of instruction for most of the school day.

2. When the first policy principle cannot be met, the second principle guarantees the right of children to attend a school that shows full respect for the language variety learned at home or valued most by the family, including respect for its role in preserving important ethnic, traditional, social, gender, or religious values and interests. In other words, use of the minority-language variety would be encouraged and valued in every school context, even while it is not used as the...
vehicle of instruction. (For an extensive list of approaches to valuing minority languages in schools, see Corson 1999.)

3. This policy principle guarantees the right of children to learn, to the highest level of proficiency possible, the standard-language variety of wider communication used by the society as a whole. In other words, complete mastery of the local variety of English would be a key goal of children’s education.

This third principle also meets the main concerns of English Only advocates in the United States, if I understand them correctly. Clearly it would be socially unjust if any student left school without sufficient mastery of the local variety of English to continue on to later stages of education and to live happily and autonomously in this country.

Later in this chapter I discuss further the first principle. The ethical justification for minority first-language maintenance comes from the reasons and accounts of relevant users of that language in the local context. If the local people value first-language maintenance in schools, then, following a critically real approach, policymakers are ethically obliged to support the first principle, or at least the second principle if local conditions of linguistic pluralism make it impossible to support the first.

On the other hand, if local people want nothing more than access to English-language instruction, policymakers are obliged to respect that view too, but only after they have engaged in community education to point out the likely negative consequences of following that policy. People need to be fairly informed of the academic advantages of bilingual education they would be denying their children (see the section “The Advantages of Being Bilingual”). And people need to be fairly informed of the intellectual advantages of being bilingual.

At the same time, in settings where many languages exist alongside one another, it might not be possible for more than a few schools to be organized to meet the first principle. In discussions of ethics, “ought” always implies “can”: People are not obliged to do what they cannot reasonably do. Again, in these highly pluralist settings, the second principle becomes the second-best alternative for most schools.
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Yet the second principle is hardly good enough for children from a broad range of backgrounds. Clearly, as I argue below, just valuing the minority language does not go far enough for many students, such as hearing-impaired children who sign, or users of Native American languages, or children in general for whom loss of their minority first language would create academic difficulties (Corson 1999). These children and many others will always need the support that the first policy principle offers.

The Choice: Socially Just Language Policies or English Only?

The demographic changes raise other questions about political and economic power. Will that power, now held disproportionately by whites, be shared in the new America? What will happen when Hispanics overtake blacks as the nation’s single largest minority?

Fear of strangers, of course, is nothing new in American history. . . . [But] despite this strife, many historians argue that there was a greater consensus in the past on what it meant to be an American, a yearning for a common language and culture, and a desire to assimilate.

Today, they say, there is more emphasis on preserving one’s ethnic identity, on finding ways to highlight and defend one’s cultural roots. The question is whether, in the midst of such change, there is also enough glue to hold Americans together. (Booth 1998, 17)

Barely perceptible changes in status are occurring today in the United States perhaps more than at any other time in this country’s recent past. And those who have a vested interest in the status quo are beginning to resent those changes. While there is nothing necessarily sinister about this resentment, it is dangerous if it encourages people to ignore the fact that diversity is part of the reality of the social world as a whole, not just part of the realities of dominant sectional groups in society. In democracies, dominant groups usually go to great lengths to permit diversity among their members: in religion, in social preferences, in lifestyle, and so forth. But nondominant groups often meet prejudice, which succeeds in ostracizing or oppressing because nondominant groups lack the voice to prevent it.
A critical realist perspective acknowledges the existence of diversity as something that can no longer be excluded from human affairs, or from deciding social policy. So for me, a major objection to the English Only movement is that it is sadly out of touch with the real world. And because it distorts this reality to serve the interests of sectional groups, the main idea behind English Only is a dangerous ideology, one that will have harmful results for those whose interests it does not serve, and eventually even for the sectional interests of those who promote it.

Status Planning and Social Justice

Changes in status, like those Booth mentions, affect languages and their speakers all the time in incidental ways. But the aim of the English Only movement is to advance planned language change to promote the status of English. Accordingly, the movement’s activities fall firmly within the area of study known as status-language planning. In this approach to language planning, the way a language is used in society is changed in planned ways in order to affect its status (see Wodak and Corson 1997).

As an example: French and English in Canada have been made official languages of the country as a whole. A range of government programs and legislation now operate in Canada to help make this law work in practice. In contrast, in the United States there are some who would make English the sole official language. This would also require a range of government programs and legislation, so it would also be a form of status-language planning, albeit heading in a more narrow direction in justice terms. To change the status of English in this way would change the status of other languages in the United States, especially the widely spoken Spanish language. Also, when the status of a language changes, the status of its users is affected as well.

Canada’s policy of bilingualism deliberately raised the status of speakers of French across the country, and it did so in ways that are more consistent with a critically real approach to social justice because the policy responded directly to the reasons and experiences of French speakers. I should add that the policy has caused some petty inconveniences in some places for speakers of
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English. On a more serious level, it has left speakers of Native and immigrant languages in an undefined policy position. But overall the inconveniences have been minor, especially when balanced against the greater good that has resulted for French speakers and the markedly better climate for diversity in general that Canada has begun to enjoy as a result of this expression of tolerance (Corson and Lemay 1996).

In contrast, an English Only policy in the United States would deliberately reduce the status of many Spanish and other minority-language speakers in the country and privilege speakers of English in almost every public context. And in this case, the inconveniences inflicted on the minority-language speakers would go well beyond the petty. By restricting the use of minority languages, this policy would impose severe constraints on freedom of movement, freedom of action, and freedom of speech for the speakers of those languages. Indeed, I doubt that the U.S. Constitution could tolerate the resulting long-term inconsistencies. But my concern here is with the pursuit of social justice, which always runs well ahead of archaic constitutional details, or at least should do so.

An English Only policy is the result of the kind of decision that Rawls’s approach to social justice should be able to discourage. Yet in practice, the Rawls approach would actually sanction English Only policies in many contexts. As mentioned, Rawls works from a first principle rather like the Golden Rule, but his first principle avoids the rider that George Bernard Shaw adds to that rule. It avoids the fact that decision makers cannot see the world from the point of view of those who are different from themselves and who do not enjoy the same privileged language position.

The work of language planners now attracts more critical attention because so much language planning directly or indirectly bolsters the language varieties of speakers who are already privileged in many ways. Often it does so at the expense of the majority of people in a given language community whose language varieties are marginalized as a result of their speakers’ lowly sociocultural status and near powerlessness. Bilingual education is even stigmatized by many as being a part of the problem, rather than a major part of the solution (Fillmore 1998).
Bilingual Education, Social Justice, and English Only

A helpful definition of bilingual education contrasts it clearly with English as a second language (ESL) education. Bilingual education differs from ESL in using a nondominant language as the medium of instruction during some substantial part of the school day (Cummins and Corson 1997). Regrettably, this distinction seems to escape the notice of many educational policymakers in the United States and elsewhere.

The United States’ Bilingual Education Act legislation seems to respond directly to the fact that the premature loss of minority students’ first languages tends to inhibit their transition to learning the majority tongue. But in practice, the response of most schools and school districts has been to treat language-minority students solely as English deficient. These students lack English, so the typical policy response in schools is to give them extra teaching in English and to expect a rapid transition to the use of English across the curriculum. This is close to the zero level of first-language support sanctioned by the Unz initiative in California.

Indeed, given the fact that speaking only English has been repeatedly upheld as essential to a truly American ethnicity, there seem to be major obstacles to moving beyond this attitude in the discourses of power in the United States. And today, these “English first” policies get far wider political support in the United States than in other countries (Ricento 1997; Cummins and Corson 1997). The clear trend in the United States seems to be away from bilingual education (Fillmore 1998), away from the realities of the world, and away from social justice.

For most of the history of schooling in English-speaking countries, minority-language children have not had the valuable start that bilingual education offers. Almost everywhere in the English-speaking world the standard practice, after enrolling minority-language students, is to ignore their first languages and give them as much ESL as possible as soon as possible. Teachers and administrators often do more than ignore the minority language, forbidding its use in the school environment and mocking its users, arguing wrongly that to allow its use in any way would
interfere with the learning of English and prevent students from becoming fully involved in the majority culture.

Recently, much more thought has been given to the fairness and the educational effectiveness of this policy. Educators are more aware these days of what happens when schools do not build on children’s first languages in the early to middle school years. They realize the importance for brain development of the signs and symbols that children experience in learning their first language. These signs, especially first-language words and other expressions, shape the early brain development of the young long before they arrive in school (Corson 1995). Although this is not a shaping in any final sense, it is incorrect to think that the different encounters with cultural signs that minority-language children have had are irrelevant to their learning in the new setting. Acting on this false belief is likely to disadvantage many minority-language children academically. It also prevents them from making use of the best vehicle available to them for engaging with their new culture: their first language.

Indeed, there are powerful intellectual and cultural advantages to maintaining young children’s first languages in school. By giving young minority-language students carefully designed bilingual education, schools provide benefits that go well beyond those offered by ESL education.

The Advantages of Being Bilingual

Until the 1950s, most research on bilingualism viewed it as a rather unhelpful possession, useful mainly for professional interpreters. Bilingualism was seen as a problem for education to remove, mainly through intensive teaching in the majority language aimed at bringing students quickly into the majority culture. But highly successful programs in the 1960s, especially those provided for Anglophones in French-immersion programs in Montreal, helped bring about change. New theories developed that took account of sociocultural factors in the development of bilingualism. This work added weight to the growing body of evidence suggesting that there are real intellectual and sociocultural advantages to having a bilingual education.
The bilingual education issue is complicated by sharp differences in the value placed on minority languages in schools in different places and at different times. The early bilingual research studies, from 1910 to 1960, were themselves affected by bias and distortion (Corson 1998, 1999). Widespread racism in the early twentieth century helped make minority languages unpopular, and the users of these languages often became ashamed of them. So in most countries, including the United States and Canada, whole generations of people refused to use their minority first languages in public. These language varieties were also thought to pose a threat to social cohesion and national solidarity. As a result, in formal education efforts were made almost everywhere to replace minority languages with the dominant language. Additionally, policymakers selectively preferred research evidence showing the negative effects of bilingualism, while other positive research was ignored. Although recent research confirms the great benefits of bilingual education (Collier 1992; Cummins and Corson 1997), the effects of the earlier distortions continue in some places, and they certainly continue to influence public policy.

Since the 1960s, evidence has been growing to confirm a point that might seem obvious with the benefit of hindsight: bilingual children have much more experience in using language, which should translate into improved performance in most of the areas of activity where language and thought converge (Collier 1992; Cummins and Corson 1997). Research in the physical sciences has long supported this claim; bilinguals are said to mature earlier than monolinguals, both in the development of cerebral lateralization for language use and in acquiring skills for linguistic abstraction. But there are other advantages too. For example, maintaining the minority language is said by many to develop a desirable form of cultural diversity in societies; it promotes ethnic identity, leads to social adaptability, adds to the psychological security of the child, and develops linguistic awareness (Crystal 1987).

Research on bilingualism also shows that becoming bilingual has cognitive advantages for the learner (Cummins 1996). There is growing evidence for the following claims:

- bilinguals are superior to monolinguals on divergent thinking tests
◆ bilinguals have some advantage in their analytical orientation to language
◆ bilinguals show some increased social sensitivity in situations requiring verbal communication
◆ bilinguals have some advantages in clear thinking and analytical functioning

These advantages prompted further questions about the value of offering bilingual education more widely. An important question to answer is whether schools for language minorities are better at doing what they do if they offer quality bilingual programs. The evidence suggests that they are.

The Advantages of Bilingual Education for Young Children

Quality bilingual education is a recent development in its early stages of evolution. But these programs are developing rapidly in some places to serve very different national needs: as a step in moving toward recognizing a single or several national languages; as a way of making national contact with a world language; as a way of putting to use the multilingual resources that immigrants bring to a country; and as a way of extending language rights and social justice to linguistic minorities. As mentioned, this kind of bilingual education is still not widely available in the United States, for reasons that are partly historical and partly ideological.

Cummins and Corson (1997) provide a guide to the international research in bilingual education. The consistently positive reviews from the forty countries surveyed overturn some earlier views about bilingualism and education:

◆ They offer strong evidence that quality bilingual programs have been influential in developing language skills and building academic achievement generally.
◆ They prove the common view—that immersion programs are only effective with the very young—to be mistaken.
They suggest that in some respects older learners have advantages over younger ones.

They report evidence that lower-ability children also benefit from immersion programs.

They conclude that a quality bilingual program will support and aid development in the first language.

Two theories developed by Cummins provide a backdrop to much of the recent research.

**Cummins’s Two Hypotheses**

In 1976 Cummins published his “threshold hypothesis,” which has become influential in explaining differences in the achievement of students in second-language programs, and its conclusion is widely supported by research studies in many places, notably Australia, Italy, and India (Cummins 1996). According to this theory, there may be minimum or threshold levels of competence that bilingual children must attain in their first languages to avoid cognitive disadvantages and to allow the potentially beneficial aspects of becoming bilingual to influence cognitive functioning.

This first hypothesis helps explain many different things about the educational success and failure of minority-language groups. As a basis for educational policy, it suggests that minority-language maintenance should be available to minority-language children until the years of middle childhood if their academic achievement is not to suffer. In other words, on social justice grounds, language policies should sanction bilingual education whenever possible as an alternative form of education that language-minority communities can avail themselves of.

A second hypothesis from Cummins (1996) is also relevant. The “interdependence hypothesis” looks at the relationship between the learner’s first and second languages. Certain aspects of language proficiency are common to both first and second languages—aspects that are interdependent. As a result, less instruction in the second language often results in higher second-language proficiency scores for students who are young users of a minor-
ity language. But more instruction in their second language results in higher second-language proficiency scores for majority-language students.

Three key points about minority bilingual education follow from these two theories:

◆ A high level of proficiency in both languages is likely to provide an intellectual advantage to children in all subjects over their monolingual classmates.

◆ In social situations where there is likely to be serious erosion of the immigrant language, that language needs maintaining until the years of middle childhood to support the learning of English and to support academic learning.

◆ High-level second-language proficiency depends on well-developed first-language proficiency (i.e., like the proficiency in their first language that older ESL students have).

Arguing from these three points, Cummins (1996) concludes that young children from language-minority groups profit from bilingual programs if their minority first language plays the major role because this lays a language foundation that cannot otherwise be guaranteed. This contrasts with the findings for children from majority-language backgrounds, who benefit from bilingual programs in which the second language is used more frequently. In this second case, a firm foundation in the majority first language develops quite naturally because it is the language of wider communication in society. Similarly, older immigrant students whose first languages are already well developed benefit most from English Only programs in which their first language is not supported as a vehicle of instruction (Corson 1999).

**Maintenance Bilingual Education Programs at Work**

Increasingly, maintenance bilingual education programs—programs with the objective of maintaining minority languages and literacy—are living up to the research on bilingualism. Bilingual programs for minority-language children are the subject of extensive study and development in many places (see Cummins and Corson 1997; Corson 1999). In the United States, Lily Wong
Fillmore conducted research into the effectiveness of different instructional practices in developing the academic English-language skills of Hispanic/Latino and Chinese minority-language students (Chamot 1988). She reports four major instructional factors as significant:

- high-quality teaching, including clear lesson organization, directions and explanations, appropriate aids, attention to higher-level skills, and opportunities for oral activities
- high-quality instructional language, including clarity, coherence, use of contexts, paraphrasing, responding to student feedback, and discussion of grammar and vocabulary
- effective classroom management with stress on academic rather than nonacademic activities
- provision for equal opportunities for the practice of English

In these studies, effective classrooms displayed a balance of teacher-directed and individualized activities. In bilingual classrooms, students did best when the languages were presented separately without translations. But there were differences in the learning styles of the Chinese and the Hispanic/Latino students. The Hispanic/Latino students gained most from interaction with their peers; the Chinese students gained most in structured and fairly quiet classrooms. Here we see clear differences in instructional needs that would be missed by policymakers who are not from the relevant language-minority community.

A long-term comparison study in the United States (Chamot 1988) examined three approaches to bilingual schooling for Hispanic/Latino children:

- immersion, in which content subjects are taught through simplified English
- early-exit or short-term transitional bilingual programs of two to three years
- late-exit or long-term transitional bilingual programs of five to six years
Researchers report that long-term bilingual programs are most effective in promoting progress in both Spanish and English, and that immersion programs lead to a greater use of English in school by students. Elsewhere in the United States, Spanish-language-dominant children benefit academically and in their English-language acquisition when their mother tongue is used as the language of instruction in the early school years (Gándara 1994). A synthesis of research undertaken in the United States finds that bilingual education is much more effective than monolingual approaches to language acquisition. Bilingual education promotes long-term academic gains and also leads to improvements that continue to grow in consistent ways (Collier 1992).

In majority-Anglophone parts of Canada, the more longstanding attention given to the needs of Francophone minorities has also led to research and changes in policy and practice for immigrant children. Clearly, subtractive bilingual education is unsuitable for Francophone Canadians who live in Anglophone areas. Although these students certainly need English to live in that environment, the evidence confirms that strong French-maintenance approaches are the best way to ensure their English-speaking abilities. For example, Francophone minority children in Ontario schools who get most of their education in French, tend to have higher academic achievement and to succeed better in the work world than those taught in English or in only nominally bilingual schools. Although this finding is relevant to immigrant Canadian children as well as Canadian-born language-minority children, maintenance forms of bilingual education for immigrant Canadians are still rare, as they are for U.S. immigrants.

Clearly, the provision of bilingual education under conditions like those just described is consistent with a critically real approach to social justice. On the evidence provided, the first policy principle, outlined in the first half of this chapter, deserves support whenever possible; the ideal way to do this is to provide bilingual immersion programs for young children who need them and whose parents are convinced of the value of bilingual education. This sort of provision, however, is beyond the reach of many schools and school systems where many different language vari-
eties are in use. In these settings, the second policy principle comes into play. Schools provide second-best arrangement by valuing student minority languages in other ways. Practical methods for implementing this move away from my theme of a critically real approach, but there are many different ways to support minority first-language development even when the school does all its teaching in English. For now, I turn to the different varieties of English itself that schools use as vehicles of instruction.

Standard and Nonstandard Varieties: Ebonics and Critical Language Awareness

This second, rather intractable issue asks about fairer policies for the users of nonstandard varieties of English. Much of what follows is drawn from Corson (1998; 1999), where I set out policies and school practices in more detail. A myriad language varieties exist in all communities, but people have little awareness of them. In the United States, for example, the debate over the use of Ebonics in the 1990s suggests that considerable public confusion exists about language varieties and what they are. While the intensity of that debate confirms that bias against nonstandard varieties of English is still rampant (Baugh 1997), I believe that the English Only movement will only confuse things further by lowering the status of any and every language variety that is not the variety of standard English that English Only policymakers believe they favor.

Ebonics is a name given to the many varieties of African American English which retain traces of African languages in their form and structure. There are many rival views on the place these varieties should have in formal education, as revealed by the contributors to a prominent publication on the topic ("Ebonics" 1997). In that delicately balanced essay, each contrasting view is supported by different authorities who are respected for their links with the community of nonstandard variety users. But the use of the single name—Ebonics—is probably not very helpful to the debate, because this label wrongly suggests that these many varieties of language are a single variety of English. This misperception compounds a related difficulty people
have when thinking about so-called “standard English,” because this is also not one but many varieties, probably best represented only by written English. In fact, the most “standard” variety of English (or any language) seems to be little more than its written version. And even this variety will vary orthographically, semantically, and even syntactically.

**Toward a Just Nonstandard Language Policy**

In language there is a constant dynamism at work, and this is true even in the more standard varieties of English, although few of us notice it much. Because infants arrive in the midst of a language system that is already fully developed and functioning, there is a tendency for us to see language as stable and natural. People often view language as unaffected by social forces, struggles, and historical events.

The history of prejudice against nonstandard language varieties is probably as long as the history of language itself. Even the ancient Greeks used different dialects as a way of stereotyping other Greeks. Most of their wars with one another tended to be fought by armies allied by dialect, despite the fact that all of the Greek city-states spoke different varieties of “Greek.” But linguists today are more cautious about using the word *dialect* because of the negative associations it tends to have. They find it more logical to use *variety* because every type of language is a variety. Even a standard language is no more than a variety with a polished reputation.

Different language varieties exist *because* of historical events. They grow out of different patterns of behavior, especially differences in power and language experience. Typically, nonstandard varieties are associated with the powerless rather than the powerful, but even affluent people can face discrimination if they use a geographical variety that differs from a dominant local one.

The nonstandard language varieties of socially marginalized people are often used unfairly as a guide to their potential and their worth as human beings. Many children arrive in schools with only irregular contact with the more standard variety used at their school. Formerly, these children were heavily penalized for having and using a language variety different from the one
awarded high status by the school. Even today, children who use a nonstandard variety tend to consider the variety used in schools as the model of excellence against which their own is measured. They often see the school’s variety as “correct,” while their own varieties are “less correct.” People still condemn themselves to silence in public settings because of feelings of shame created during their school years.

But all this began to change in the 1960s when research by William Labov and others confirmed that people from different backgrounds speak different kinds of English that vary systematically and regularly from each other. These and other studies have gradually overturned the common stereotype that nonstandard varieties are incorrect forms of a language. Instead, these varieties have their own norms and rules of use. And they deserve respect, like any variety.

So what can be done in schools? Would the first policy principle apply in this case, or the second? In the 1996 Ebonics debate in California, policymakers tried to apply the first policy principle. They wanted to use the nonstandard varieties as a vehicle of instruction in schools to supplement the local standard variety. But in most contexts of great diversity, the second policy principle seems more relevant. Nonstandard varieties need to be valued in schools, just as languages other than English should be valued in highly pluralist contexts, but they can rarely be used as the vehicle of instruction when many different varieties exist alongside one another.

Again, some version of the same devolved process of consultation seems appropriate here, because the variety of a language given status in a given situation needs to be decided by the actual participants in that context or situation. That is to say, which nonstandard varieties are valued in a school will be decided by locals, not by a remote agency unconnected with the context and the values of the people who inhabit it.

And it is essential to put an end to the long-running tragedy once common in all schools, when teachers believed their job was “to stamp out error.” Not long ago, because nonstandard varieties were mistakenly perceived as incorrect and slovenly speech, children were punished for using them. Usually these children were from immigrant, low-income, or Native American
communities, at the margins of society. And their speech helped mark them as candidates for educational failure. They were stereotyped.

We know that language helps confirm stereotypes and activate prejudices. We know that negative teacher attitudes toward children’s speech affect teachers’ expectations, which affect pupil performance. And even today, the more standard varieties tend to be more respected in schools than nonstandard varieties. Most teachers still consider a standard variety as more than just the variety used by the privileged individuals of society. They see it as the standard language of education, the complete mastery of which is the mark of school success.

While people disagree about how to pass on mastery of the standard variety, it gets preference these days not so much because of its “correctness” but more often because of what is considered its general “appropriateness.” If a standard variety is linked historically with the written language and with literacy, it will always seem a more appropriate vehicle for education. If it is the variety used in higher and technical education, familiarity with it provides easier access to scientific and academic discourse. And if some version of a standard variety is used nationally and internationally, ability in it offers a medium of communication across national boundaries.

Yet different international varieties of English are appearing all the time, bringing variants on “the standard.” In North America, even written English is veering increasingly away from the norms for written English used elsewhere, especially at the source of English—England. So whatever “the standard” might be, it is forever beyond our grasp. And what can teachers do about nonstandard varieties in schools when even the “standard variety” is really nothing of the kind? In most places, and in line with the second principle, the main thing teachers are trying to do is give more respect to nonstandard varieties, especially by not penalizing their use or mocking their users.

Just as important, though, is helping all students understand why political and historical events have made one local variety of the language seem more “appropriate” in contexts of power such as schools, and why nonstandard varieties are still unfairly kept on the margins. In their own interests, students need to be
aware that less prestigious varieties are still judged unfavorably in many settings, which might disadvantage them in those settings. But at the same time, children need to know that non-standard language is not incorrect or even inappropriate except in the stern eyes of the disapproving. Indeed, this kind of critical language awareness is a necessary prerequisite for children to have if they are to help change unjust social and linguistic arrangements.

Passing on critical language awareness is never easy, even for skilled teachers. At least today teachers are better equipped for the job as they begin to shed some of the prejudices of the past. Seeing the world stripped free of the distorting ideologies that human beings have imposed on it is what critical realism is all about. Its aim is to reclaim reality.

Conclusion

Schools can take several complementary lines of action in treating language and social justice issues in education (Corson 1999). Each of these forms of social action can foster the language awareness that people need in order to see through and past distorting ideologies like the English Only policy and to approach the world in a more critically real way. Each of these forms of social action combines respect for the good of the individual with respect for the good of the social group.

First, we need to create better patterns of communication within school organizations, in classrooms, and in staff rooms, patterns which free participants to consider planned, rational, just, and consensual action in pursuit of their educational aims. Second, schools in many places are finding they need commonly agreed on local policies for meeting the kinds of complex problems considered in this chapter: language policies on race and minority cultures, bilingualism, poverty, and disadvantage. Third, many suggest that children in schools need to acquire “critical language awareness” (see van Lier and Corson 1997) through a language curriculum that promotes social awareness of discourse, critical awareness of variety, and consciousness of and practice for change.
Works Cited


