

## Book Review

Carol Evans  
University of Arizona

Crawford, J. 2000. *At war with diversity: U.S. language policy in an age of anxiety*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters Ltd,.

On November 7, bilingual education proponents in Arizona lost a hard-fought battle to defeat a ballot proposition whose purpose was to drastically reduce the amount of bilingual education in the state's public schools. As this review is written, in cities and on Indian reservations around the state, school superintendents, their administrators, and their lawyers are poring over the new law and previous court decisions in order to discern what practices may be legal with respect to language minority children in the coming school year, and what practices will not. The passage of this new Arizona statute, of course, is only the latest in a series of political efforts over the past 20 years to restrict the uses of non-English languages in this country.

Examinations of the arguments used in these restrictionist language policy campaigns have been in the literature for some time. Baron (1990) and Crawford (1992), for example, provide useful book-length analyses of the English-only and official English phenomena of the 1980s. These treatments, interestingly, like the present book, draw little from the theoretical language policy or language planning literature (with the exception of Ruiz's [1984] orientations toward language planning), relying much more on the direct analysis of historical documents, campaign literature, journalistic accounts, and court and other legal documents. Crawford's (1989; revised in 1999) book on the history and theory of bilingual education devotes considerable attention to the mounting ominous intonations of these campaigns with respect to the future of bilingual programs, and Krashen's (1996) *Under attack: The case against bilingual education* and (1999) *Condemned without a trial: Bogus arguments against bilingual education* provide analyses of the arguments and rhetoric used by English-only proponents in their campaigns to convince the American public that bilingual education should not continue as part of language policy.

In his new book of six essays, *At war with diversity: U.S. language policy in an age of anxiety*, James Crawford provides a more extensive look at recent U.S. language policy by focusing on the above and other issues as a series of policy problems. Each issue is treated with insightful historical analysis, and Crawford takes admirable care to discourage generalizations about language issues by providing many well-researched examples of varied contexts and situations. Noticeably, but deliberately lacking in the book, is an analysis of ideological assumptions implicit in the arguments and rationales articulated in the language conflicts described.

Taken together, these essays effectively document and analyze the most prominent public policy debates of the past 20 years, chronologically, as follows: the early English-Only movement, the Official-English campaign in the 1990s, the decline in support for bilingual education, and the passage of the anti-bilingual education proposition in California. Fortunately, however, Crawford does not limit his focus to the language issues receiving attention in the policy and political arena. In two essays about the cascading loss of Native American languages, he also gives needed voice to the urgency for respectful language policy that addresses these American language problems. In sum, this compact volume provides invaluable background and perspective on the major issues of U.S. language policy at the beginning of the new century.

Like Baron (1990) and others, Crawford begins with the assertion that the present anti-bilingualism movement has been made possible in part by the absence of an official language policy in this country at the national level. In this absence, states and communities have historically acted from time to time to create their own policies. Crawford suggests that the recent trend of state ratifications of official-English policies (20 have been ratified since 1980) is in part a reaction to the somewhat more obliging period during which state bilingual education laws were passed. Stronger reasons, however, are needed to explain why states that had the power to create such laws for over 200 years have rather suddenly found them indispensable.

The anti-immigrant rhetoric surrounding all of these campaigns leaves little room for doubt that the real issue in the current conflict over language policy is the rise in immigration, especially of Asians and Latinos. The increases are impressive, of course, and on cited. But Crawford does well to explain how the *perception of change* from previously very low numbers of immigrants allowed, as well as the limited diversity of those immigrants, has made the impact of the recent immigrants more pronounced for many Americans.

In 1970, the foreign-born population numbered only 4.8%. By contrast, in 1996, 9.3 % of the population was foreign born, with that percentage climbing still higher. The remarkably low earlier percentage marked an atypical phenomenon in what has been called “the land of immigrants.” The low ebb

of newcomers was brought about by the creation of strict quotas and laws adopted in the 1920s, which severely limited immigration, and selectively closed the door to entry from non-Anglo-Saxon nations. These racist immigration laws were outgrowths of fearful and negative reactions to the high immigration in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

By the time Congress repealed the quota restrictions in 1965, the reduction of immigration, together with the assimilation of generations of immigrants already here, had created among many White Americans a sense of social normalcy that was quite insular, monolingual, monocultural, and monoracial. This sensibility was significantly strengthened by strong patterns of racial, ethnic, and social class segregation that also reduced White Americans' contact with Americans of color.

Today's new immigrants are not primarily European, but Asian and Latino. The new immigrants have found home and work in communities all around the United States. The languages they have brought are not French and German, but Spanish, Mandarin, Hmong, and Vietnamese. Suddenly, in the eyes of many, our diversity is excessive.

Despite the anti-immigrant sensibilities that appear to fuel the current anti-bilingualism movement, and despite the paranoid and racist rhetoric of some of its organizers, Crawford emphasizes that we who will fight the movement must recognize that it is a nativist mainstream phenomenon. Moreover, he believes that the source of most Americans' support for the movement is a general and perhaps vague sense of unhappiness, fearfulness, and dissatisfaction with society and their own situations in it. "Today's nativism seldom takes the form of a pure undiluted hatred of foreigners. Rather it is a volatile brew of anxieties and animosities, insecurities and prejudices, which flow from class as well as ethnicity" (pp. 24–25).

Unfortunately, immigrants are easy scapegoats for such unhappiness. Like Fishman (1992), Crawford finds that many Americans, decrying "the declining quality of life, overcrowding, crime, rootlessness, and incivility" in our society (p. 22), associate the negative changes with the increase in diversity and immigration.

Crawford rejects simple ideological explanations such as "linguicism," the melting pot, or racism for anti-bilingualism in this country, concluding instead that language policy conflicts are "proxies" for battles over social control and economic self interests. "Ultimately language politics are determined by material interests—struggles for social and economic supremacy—which normally lurk beneath the surface of the public debate (p. 10)."

He illustrates that social, economic, and political forces determine whether or not conflicts arise by describing a number of instances of language conflict in American history. Specifically, he examines the experiences of

the Pennsylvania Germans, Louisianans, Californios, American Indians, Puerto Ricans, Native Hawaiians, and the European immigrants. His briefer accounts of more recent (1980s) language conflicts in Monterey Park, California, Dade County, Florida, and Lowell, Massachusetts, are also helpful in demonstrating that each context has created in different ways a struggle for economic advantage or political power.

Although it is useful and important to focus attention upon the power and economic issues that drive language policy decisions, it is risky to summarily dismiss, as Crawford does, the usefulness of ideological analysis related to those power issues. Ideologies can scarcely be distinguished from issues of power. In fact, Fairclough (1989) writes:

Ideologies are closely linked to power, because the nature of the ideological assumptions embedded in particular conventions, and so the nature of those conventions themselves depends on the power relations which underlie the conventions; and because they are a means of legitimizing existing social relations and differences of power, simply through the recurrence of ordinary, familiar ways of behaving which take these relations and power differences for granted. (p. 2)

Policy issues are usually examined much more from the point of view of the powerful than from that of the less powerful. The risk in ignoring the ideological assumptions lies in subtly legitimizing (or seeming to legitimize) the conventions and assumptions of the group in power by merely explaining the situation well from their point of view.

In spite of his overt rejection of ideological discussions, Crawford manages, for the most part, to avoid this trap. Although a more theoretically critical and cohesive examination of mainstream perspectives might be desirable, one must appreciate the clarity and insightfulness with which he identifies some of these perspectives. The following excerpt, an attempt to describe one of the rationales of those who oppose public bilingualism and bilingual education, is a good example:

What seems to gall English-only advocates is not the translation of street signs or tax forms or children's lessons, but what these accommodations symbolize: a public recognition that limited-English speakers are part of the community and therefore entitled to services from government, even if that may entail "special" programs and expenditures. Why would anyone find this threatening? Perhaps because it legitimizes diversity, notwithstanding the challenges involved. It implies certain rights that were not previously acknowledged. Thus, in a small way, when government offers bilingual assistance, it elevates the status of language minorities. It suggests that immigrants and Native peoples need not abandon their heritage

to be considered American—or at least to be given access to democratic institutions. In short, it alters structures of power, access to democratic institutions. The demand for language restrictions, by contrast, is a demand to reinforce the existing social order. (p.27)

This perspective is embedded with assumptions that “real” Americans are those who speak only English, and that language minorities deserve less responsiveness from their government, and lower status than “real” Americans.

Another rationale—also full of ideological assumptions—mentioned but not developed by Crawford in the present work, is that language minorities will be *helped* economically and socially by language policies that force them to learn and use English as soon as possible (Tollefson, 1991).

Both of these arguments have played important roles in the campaigns to eliminate bilingual education. These themes, in fact, and those of the general anxieties of the American public mentioned earlier, have been shockingly more relevant and influential for much of the voting public in the California and Arizona campaigns than rigorous research evidence about the benefits of bilingual education or positive results from actual local bilingual programs.

Crawford notes frustrating ironies in the political situation of bilingual education. The modern form of bilingual education came into existence in the 1960s as an educational solution to a social problem. Although federal funding, state laws, and federal court decisions served to institutionalize it, the true political support for protecting bilingual education in its fledgling years was parent, community, and ethnic activism. Yet, as it has become more institutionalized, it has “become less of a community concern, less of a social movement” (p. 96). Its maintenance and political defense have increasingly been the province of professionals and academics. As a result, at the very moment when bilingual education is most mature, research having established its potential benefits and teaching techniques and materials having been refined, its essential grassroots political base has moved on to fight for other, perhaps more easily explainable issues. As Crawford notes, “to the extent that bilingual education relies heavily on expert opinion, its viability becomes increasingly tenuous” (p. 97).

Crawford nevertheless insists that academics must get involved in the political efforts to support bilingual education, and not maintain the usual distance from the fray. I certainly agree. Experience in the California and Arizona proposition fights suggests, however, that becoming involved under the fire of an election is too late. Political and organizational restraints by the media limit the opportunity to present issues and evidence with clarity. Additionally, as the opposing campaign works to play on the anxieties and fears of voters about the future, and to distort the facts about current and future language policy, the words of the academic become just that—academic.

University professors must begin long before political campaigns, looking for every opportunity on campus and out in the general public to disrupt myths, ideologies, and ignorance about language by teaching American history related to language. The many historical examples described by Crawford are useful beginnings, as is the information about Native American education and languages.

Native American languages are consistently ignored in the current policy debates. As one small example, about a month before the recent election, the Mexican American woman who initiated the anti-bilingual education proposition in Arizona admitted in public that it had not occurred to her or to her collaborators that Navajo and other Native American bilingual education efforts would be affected by her campaign. Even as a concerned Arizonan, she was not aware of Native American bilingual education programs—only of the Spanish/English bilingual education programs that she hoped to end. The proposition her organization submitted was a considerably more restrictive version of the one passed in California. In that state's proposition fight, Native Americans and their languages were never an issue, since all of the approximately 50 Indian languages indigenous to that state are extinct or near extinction.

The endangerment of so many Native American languages still in existence is a particularly chilling example of the role of power in language policy. "After all," Crawford points out, language death does not happen in privileged communities. It happens to the dispossessed and the disempowered, peoples who most need their cultural resources to survive. (p. 63)

Crawford recounts the history of the U.S. government's deliberate attempt to eliminate Native American languages through linguistic and cultural genocide from approximately 1868 to the 1940s. Native American children were forced to attend government boarding schools, where they were and punished and humiliated for speaking their Indian languages. This brutal effort failed to destroy the languages in the short term because of the determined resistance with which Indian peoples responded. Besides, even Native Americans who adopted English and Anglo ways at the schools were not accepted comfortably into mainstream society.

During the more recent period, English and other elements of the dominant culture have been adopted and become increasingly common in the cultural lives of many Native Americans. These types of cultural and linguistic changes internal to a language community are characteristic of shift away from the heritage language.

As a means of illustrating the distinctiveness of the language histories of Native American groups, Crawford outlines in useful ways the particular social and economic circumstances of the Navajo, Hualapai, Pascua Yaqui, and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw. He offers four arguments to those who doubt the need for efforts to revitalize Indian languages, but deduces that these changes cannot be brought about by outsiders, however well-intentioned. The hope he offers is for developing leadership within Native American groups.

Near the end of her study, *Growing Up Bilingual*, Ana Zentella writes that treatment of linguistic minorities in this country at times makes her pessimistic about the future of our society. Her case studies demonstrate with painful clarity that a war against diversity is a war on people, their friends, and their families. Yet, the resilience and courage of one of the New York Puerto Rican women she has studied from childhood, as well as that of some of the woman's friends and family, give Zentella a sense of hope:

Their repudiation of a stigmatized identity for their Puerto Ricanness, their color, their poverty, their bilingualism, places them in the vanguard of the opening of the nation's cultural, racial, and linguistic frontiers. Their contribution is both revolutionary and essential: to help their fellow Americans see that the browning of the U.S. is underway for the benefit of all, and that as the country is changing what it looks like, so it must change how it looks at itself. (p. 287)

## References

- Baron, D. (1990). *The English-only question*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Crawford, J. (1989). *Bilingual education: History, politics, theory, and practice*. Trenton, NJ: Crane.
- Crawford, J. (1992). *Hold your tongue*. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. New York: Longman.
- Krashen, S. (1996). *Under attack: The case against bilingual education*. Culver City, CA: Language Education Associates.
- Krashen, S. (1999). *Condemned without a trial: Bogus arguments against bilingual education*. Culver City, CA: Language Education Associates.
- Ruiz, R. (1984). Orientations in language planning. *NABE Journal*, 8 (2), 15–34.
- Tollefson, J. (1991). *Planning language, planning inequality*. New York: Longman.
- Zentella, A. C. (1997). *Growing up bilingual*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.