

SCHOOL SYSTEM PROVISIONS FOR CHILDREN WHOSE MOTHER TONGUE  
IS NOT THE PRINCIPAL INSTRUCTIONAL MEDIUM

by

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## INTRODUCTION

Many children in the world today find it necessary or desirable to learn to communicate in a language other than their mother tongue. These are the potential bilinguals of the world of tomorrow if they receive an adequate education as children today, but in many cases their education has been neglected. Numerous children are required to attend schools where the language spoken is not that of their home and family. Although this may be due to a decision of the parent or child as is the case in the English schools of Uruguay or the private foreign language schools of Egypt, some families exercise no choice in the matter. Even the Negroes who migrated from the South to the Northern ghetto speak a "substandard" dialect of English and must be classed as non-native speakers of English, at least as it is used in the schools. The problem is more intense for the Spanish-Americans of the Southwest and Florida, immigrant children, or the African children whose home vernaculars are so specific that a school utilizing each of them is absolutely impractical. For all of these children the school experience requires more than adjusting to the discipline of the school--it also means adjusting to a foreign language and culture.<sup>1</sup>

In the case of many of these children, the socio-economic class of the parents inflicts the child with an even greater problem. Not only does he have a problem with language, but he has had few experiences in common with his peer group. Even mastering the vocabulary and structure of English does not allow the child to catch up with his classmates unless he

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<sup>1</sup>M. Urquides, "Tucson's Tale of Two Cultures," NEA Journal, LVI (February, 1967), 62.

has had adequate experiences to internalize meanings. The problem is also observed in some West African schools, but is less obvious since all the children have had similar experiences to build on, while a Mexican-American child from a low socio-economic level family has few experiences in common with his middle-class classmates.

The problem is not simple, nor is it easy to define. It is present in varying degrees around the world and varies in intensity from child to child. Although English may not have been the mother tongue, for instance, it may have been spoken enough for the child to be fluent in both English and his mother tongue before starting formal education; in other cases a child has had no prior exposure to the language of the schools. There exists a continuum from one extreme to the other. Programs which help one child attain fluency fail completely with others; moreover there is a great shortage of teachers trained to deal with such linguistically different learners.

#### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was 1) to report the factors variously affecting school system practices to help alleviate the school problems of linguistically different learners as reported in the literature and 2) to examine such practices with regard to prevalence, advantages and disadvantages.

#### Definition of Terms

Linguistically different learner. This term is used according to the suggestion of Arnold<sup>1</sup> to refer to children whose language of home or

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<sup>1</sup>Richard D. Arnold, "Reliability of Test Scores for the Young Bilingual Disadvantaged," Reading Teacher, XXII (January, 1969), 341.

environment is linguistically different from that of the school. The term bilingual has frequently been used to refer to these individuals, but most are merely potential bilinguals.

Bi-lingual school. This term is used to refer to a school which uses two languages as media of instruction for all students, thus including a weaker language as the medium of instruction for all for at least part of the school day.

#### Limitations of the Study

The study is a survey of the literature as it reports school system practices intended to alleviate the problems encountered by linguistically different learners as they enter a school where the language spoken is not their mother tongue. It was limited to a survey of literature available in the Kansas State University library, primarily that published since 1960, although occasional reference was made to earlier important studies or articles.