

Living in L1, learning in L2: Language ideologies and practices of English immersion students

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Summary of the Dissertation

This study focused on the first language (L1) and English–second language (L2) language practices and ideologies of English immersion (EI) secondary school students in three European countries: Austria, Kosovo, and Slovakia. It also compared these practices and ideologies with those of non-EI students in the Slovak context, who were encountering English as a foreign language rather than as the medium of instruction. The study investigated the following research questions:

- 1) What L1 and English–L2 language *practices* do the EI students report?
- 2) What L1 and English–L2 language *ideologies* do the EI students report?
- 3) Do L1 and English–L2 language practices and ideologies differ between EI students from the three different countries?
- 4) Do the L1 and English–L2 language practices and ideologies differ between EI and non-EI students from the same country?

The theoretical framework for this study is Spolsky's (2004) *language policy* framework, which includes three components: *language management*—explicit efforts to plan or regulate languages; *language practices*—actual language habits of people; and *language ideologies*—beliefs people hold about languages. Since much research has already focused on language practices and ideologies of immigrants and minority language speakers, this study examines the less commonly researched but widely growing population of majority language students educated in English in their own countries (a minority language in these contexts, but a world language).

Methodology: Questionnaires were administered to 164 EI students in the three countries and to 123 non-EI students in Slovakia. Results were analysed and compared quantitatively. Principal component analysis revealed three components of language practices: non-interactive (receptive) language use, interactive language use with peers and technology, and interactive language use with family; these components were examined statistically. Two components of language ideology emerged for analysis: importance and value of L1 and importance and value of English. Additionally, a short answer question from the questionnaire was analysed qualitatively to provide insights into the language ideologies of EI students.

Results: EI students in all three L1 contexts reported using mainly English in non-interactive (receptive) language situations; both English and their L1 equally with peers and with technology; and almost entirely their L1 with family. However, the degree to which students used English in non-interactive language situations differed significantly different between L1 groups. Use of English in one situation tended to correlate with use of English in other situations. All EI students shared a highly positive ideology of English, though L1 ideology varied among groups. The Slovak–L1 group had a significantly less positive L1 ideology than the German–L1 group or the Albanian–L1 group, and both the Slovak–L1 and German–L1 groups had a significantly less positive L1 ideology than English ideology. The qualitative analysis showed that EI students manifested an instrumental orientation towards English whilst having a more integrative orientation towards their L1. For the Slovak EI and non–EI students, a comparison of the language practices unsurprisingly revealed that EI students use significantly more English in all areas. However, the EI and non-EI students shared similar English and L1 ideologies.

Potential for Impact: The results of this study have the potential to impact English language teaching (ELT) by providing insights which can influence the attitudes, practices and policies of individuals, classrooms and institutions.

First, this dissertation foregrounds two less often discussed components of language policy, language practices and ideologies, which can sometimes be overshadowed by language management. As it becomes more common for English to be used as a medium of instruction, it is important for teachers, schools, and policy makers to be aware of how immersion students use both English and their L1 in different aspects of their lives, and of what attitudes and beliefs they hold regarding their languages. This will allow leaders in ELT to look beyond the explicit, written language policies of schools and institutions.

Second, this research has made an initial attempt to identify the language practices and ideologies of students learning through the medium of English, but only in three contexts. The results of this dissertation could encourage further research into the language practices and ideologies of EI students from other countries, providing a more complete picture of EI language policy globally.

Third, this dissertation found a correlation between various components of language practices, indicating that EI students who tend to use more or less English in one situation exhibit this tendency across their language practices. ELT professionals can be made aware of how language practices at school may influence or be influenced by language practices in other areas of students' lives. Teachers and students can utilize the naturally occurring situations of interactive language use with peers and technology and the receptive language use situations in which students use English to promote and develop language acquisition.

It is notable that strong correlations between language practices and ideologies were not established, meaning that the *beliefs* students hold about their languages may be independent of how they *use* their languages. Additionally, English and L1 ideologies were not correlated, so educators need not be overly concerned about English language practices and ideologies of the classroom influencing students' L1 ideologies. This finding is in significant contrast to the assumption that the global hegemony of English could lead to a devaluing of national L1s. From this study, it seems that L1 ideology depends on L1 context and differs among EI students in different countries. This dissertation only begins to touch upon the complexities of language ideologies, and its findings should encourage more research in this area.

Additionally, the comparisons made in this dissertation between EI and non-EI students from Slovakia are important for administrators to consider when deciding whether to include English in the curriculum as a foreign language or to adopt it as the medium of instruction for some or all academic subjects. Though it does not claim direct causation or influence, this study does suggest that a difference exists in the language practices of EI and non-EI students, while language ideology remains constant for both settings. In conclusion, this dissertation draws attention to the language policy of students learning through the medium of English, and can encourage further research which will help inform ELT policies and practices.

References: Spolsky, B. (2009) *Language Policy*. Cambridge University Press.