

MARIE QUINN

CHAPTER 3

Choosing Languages for Teaching in Primary School Classrooms

ABSTRACT

Whilst Timorese teachers are aware and largely compliant with the linguistic policies that are promulgated through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports (MECYS), they also face competing ideological, social and pragmatic pressures in regard to the languages they use in their classrooms. Furthermore as the knowledge of language teaching in a multi-lingual context has not been addressed system-wide, teachers are encountering significant challenges in enhancing the bilingual and bi-literate competency of their students.

This chapter explores some of the issues facing Timorese primary school teachers as they attempt to teach both academic and linguistic knowledge. By drawing on classroom video footage, teacher interviews and official policy documents, it is suggested that because the national language policy for classroom teaching is unclear, teachers' classroom strategies are missing both proficiency in Portuguese and specific language methodology to address the reality of students' linguistic knowledge. However this chapter also identifies this as an opportunity for the MECYS and the school community to explore what is envisaged for the people of Timor-Leste in terms of creating a bilingual and biliterate nation.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will explore issues facing primary school teachers in Timor-Leste as they attempt to teach both academic and linguistic knowledge in their classrooms. It will suggest that while teachers are aware of directives and policies of the national government and those promulgated through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports (MECYS) – and are largely compliant with these – there are also competing ideological, social and pragmatic pressures on teachers in regard to the languages they choose to use in the classroom. These, together with the fact that knowledge of language teaching in a multi-lingual context has not been addressed system-wide, suggest a significant impact on the ability to enhance

J. Earnest (ed.), Rebuilding Education & Health in a Post-Conflict Transitional Nation: Case Studies from Timor-Leste, 23–38.
© 2008 Sense Publishers. All rights reserved.

the bilingual and bi-literate competency of students in Timorese schools. Material for this chapter will draw on video footage from Grade 5 and 6 classrooms in various sites across the country, observed in January 2006, as well as interviews with teachers reflecting on their own practice. The classroom teachers were shown excerpts of their own practice for discussion about how they chose languages for teaching, as well as general language practice questions. This data will be discussed in relation to official policy documents and studies released in the years since independence.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE POLICY AND IDENTITY

Rebuilding an independent Timor-Leste has required considerable support from the United Nations, its agencies, and international non-government organizations to stabilize, rehabilitate and administer the struggling country, bringing challenges to all sectors of government administration. In designing policies and structures for the community, the government and its agencies are making decisions on what it means to be a nation. One significant element of national identity is the language citizens are prepared to speak, although Renan cautions, "...language may invite us to unite, but it does not compel us to do so" (cited in Seton-Watson, 1981, p. 129).

In selecting Timor-Leste's official and national languages, the government reflects both symbolic and pragmatic needs of a small and new nation. The constitution of Timor-Leste (RDTL, 2002) identifies Tetum and Portuguese as the official languages of the country. Portuguese reflects the nation's history of colonization as well as resistance,¹ while Tetum is positioned as "an essential element in the construction of the Nation and in the affirmation of Timorese identity" (RDTL, 2004, p. 1). The other indigenous and first languages² are acknowledged by the constitution as "valued and [to be] developed by the State" (RDTL, 2002, Article 13), but they do not have clear and specific roles within public life, remaining strongly within the domain of home and village life.

In talking about language use in the classroom, teachers indicate an awareness of and compliance with government policy:

Bem, ita le dadauk konstitusi nebe iha tamba usa lingua oficial Portugues ho Tetum, nebe ita usa duni. Se calhar aban bain rua usa karik muda karik lingua ita guru tenki tuir abut linguagen, buat nebe governo usa.... Tamba hau nudar sidadaun ida tuir konstituisaun nebe haruka

Well, we learned in the constitution we have, that using official languages, Portuguese and Tetum, and we should use them. If there is any change to the language use in the future, teachers must follow basic language, what is used by the government... Because I am only as a citizen who should follow what constitution says

Helder³, Dili

...se iha nasaun ne'e, ninia hili katak tenki tau portuguese hanesan lingua ofisial, tetum ofisial, ne'ebe buat nebe fo sai husi ministeriu edukasaun tun

mai campo ne'e, ne'e ami halo tuir tamba buat ida ne'e ne governo ninian, estadu ninian diskursaun tun mai dehan katak ami tenki halo hanesan ne'e, ne'ebe ami halo tuir buat ne'e. Tanto buat ne'e difisil maibe buka para atu halo buat ne'e la' o ba oin

... if in this nation, they chose that (we) must put Portuguese as an official language, Tetum as an official language, this is what has been taken up by the Ministry of Education down to the field, and the State's order asked us to execute the order in this way or that way, so we just follow. Though this is a difficult thing, let us try to make this thing happen

Margarida, Dili

However, in complying with national policy there is recognition of the reality of the language environment in Timor-Leste. While no teachers interviewed expressed dissatisfaction or negative views about using Portuguese, they noted that students generally did not speak it outside the classroom:

...labarik sira aprende lisaun Portugues iha sala laran deit maibe ba liur sira la koalia.

...students only learn Portuguese in the class but outside they do not speak it.

Manuela, Baucau

Portuguese difisil ba sira tamba to'o mai eskola mak sira aprende. Ba uma sira koalia tetum.

Portuguese is difficult for them, because they only learn it when they come to school.

Margarida, Dili

Classroom observations showed that teachers used Tetum considerably in their classroom teaching, with particular educational implications for this choice (to be discussed later in this paper). However, teacher's comments about Tetum in terms of identity include:

Tetum ne'e hanesan lingua Timor

Tetum is the language of Timor

Manuela, Baucau

...ami hatene Tetum ne'e maka iha Timor tomak tenke hatene Tetum

...we know that Tetum is [spoken] in all of Timor [and everyone] must know Tetum

Rudolfo, Lautem

Hau ema nebe sidadaun nafatin mos hanesan ema Timor hau uza Tetum e Portuguese mos

I am always as a citizen as well as an Timorese, so I use Tetum and also Portuguese

Helder, Dili

These comments echo those from Leach's earlier study of the place of language in the perception of Timor-Leste's national identity, where university students identified the ability to use Tetum as a significant factor in being Timorese (2003). Teachers, similarly, display a stronger motivation to use Tetum within the classroom beyond merely what has been mandated by the constitution.

THE PLACE OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION

Both official languages are afforded a place within Timorese primary schools, although in documents drafted and published in the last five years, a shift in the prominence of Portuguese has occurred. The official languages are taught as subjects, with a greater number of lessons stipulated for Tetum instruction in the early years (5 lessons of Tetum compared to 3 of Portuguese) and more emphasis on Portuguese instruction in the upper years (6 lessons of Portuguese compared to 2 of Tetum) (MECYS, 2004a). At the same time, Portuguese as a medium of instruction has been introduced year by year to primary school class levels, so that by the school year 2005/06 all primary class levels were officially using Portuguese to teach along with Tetum. Generally, there has been tolerance of using multiple languages in the classroom to assist teachers and students work with the curriculum content, but it has remained unclear how teachers are to manage classroom language for teaching and learning.

The Primary Curriculum Implementation Plan 2004–2009 (MECYS, 2004a) suggested a bilingual approach – “To integrate the development of the two languages with other subjects” (MECYS, 2004b, p. 27) – yet it did not provide a plan as to how this would be enacted. The sentence ‘Mathematics and Timor studies will be bilingual’ appears at the end of the curriculum plan (MECYS, 2004b, p. 45), but without discussion about how this will be implemented in terms of bilingual education models. The draft education policy of the same year (MECYS, 2004b) afforded Portuguese a higher status than the co-official language Tetum – “...the implementation of Portuguese will have precedence” – with Tetum ‘a pedagogic aide’ to be used “...at levels not surpassing basic education” (MECYS, 2004a, p. 8).

In relation to the Portuguese, this position has been further strengthened by the recent educational directive from the MEC. In this, Portuguese is identified to take precedence as the language of education, while Tetum, seen predominantly as an oral language, will serve as an auxiliary language together with mother tongues:

...dado que o Tétum ainda está em processo de desenvolvimento e sendo uma língua predominantemente oral, o Português terá preferência como língua de instrução ou ensino. O Tétum, particularmente, e as demais línguas maternas serão usadas como línguas auxiliares pedagógicas, quando necessários, particularmente nos primeiros anos.

...given that Tetum is still in the process of development and being a pre-dominantly oral language, Portuguese will have preference as a language of instruction or teaching language. Tetum, particularly, and the other maternal languages will be used as auxiliary pedagogical languages, when necessary, particularly in the first years.

(MEC, 2006)

Thus, despite the constitution's recognition of the place of two official languages, the Ministry of Education has chosen to promote only one within education, with Tetum and other languages merely 'auxiliary'. From a pragmatic view, what exactly constitutes an 'auxiliary language' is not clearly explained, with teachers given little direction as to the manner in which multiple languages can be used to enhance both language learning, subject learning and, importantly, literacy learning. Instead, the focus has been on the challenge of raising teachers' competency in Portuguese, a language new to so many and one that teachers have not expressed great confidence in proficiency (see World Bank, 2003, 2004; Romiszowski, 2005). Teachers have been supported through the Portuguese Government-financed Bachelato Programme: compulsory after-hours language training throughout the country that is designed to raise the Portuguese language skills of all teachers in primary schools. This programme is up to three years of training, depending on a teacher's competence on entry. While there are other subject methodology components, the main focus is language skill development.

However, teachers require significant language proficiency to use Portuguese as a medium of instruction across subject-specific domains (for example, enough language to teach mathematics or science) to a standard that reflects the levels of academic and conceptual knowledge handled in the primary school curriculum, particularly at the senior primary levels. They also need to know the specific methodology associated with learning languages that are used extensively within the community. For some this will include Tetum as there are areas of Timor-Leste where Tetum is not part of the everyday discourse. This disparity of language experiences across the nation has not been acknowledged in the language and teaching documents.

Another aspect ignored in the documents is the difference between language and literacy: what constitutes literate – or biliterate – practice for Timorese students has not been addressed. What amounts to literacy in particular settings is not universal (Street, 1984, 2000) and is manifested in differentiated programs (Liddicoat, 2004). In monolingual communities, schooling will concentrate on teaching *in* and *about* the prevailing language. In multilingual settings there are more complex issues of using language policy to choose the languages that students speak in, write in and use for academic purposes or subjects.

A number of education models have been documented (Fishman, 1976, p. 24–27; Hamers & Blanc, 1989, p. 189–190; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 2001, p. 37) in various bilingual contexts to explain the relationship between spoken and written modes: *Transitional Bilingualism*, *Monoliterate Bilingualism*, and *Biliterate Bilingualism* in either *partial* or *full* forms. The MECYS's current position

suggests one of Monoliterate Bilingualism: one that promotes Portuguese in written modes, with Tetum and Portuguese delivered in spoken modes. However, there is no acknowledgement of this model, nor the implications of this model, over others available.

At the same time, what is ultimately enacted in the classroom will be a reflection of teachers' own understanding of what constitutes relevant language and literacy practice for students. Teachers in Timor-Leste indicate that they are grappling with these issues on a daily basis and trying to balance pragmatic and academic pressures. In talking about their practice, teachers in Timor-Leste echo many of the issues that are at the heart of teachers' decisions about which language to use in the multilingual classroom worldwide (Adendorff, 1993; Arthur, 1996; Camilleri, 1996; Hornberger and Chick, 2001; Lin, 1996; LoBianco and Liddicoat, 1991; Ncoko et al., 2000; Ndayipfukamiye, 1996). Heller and Martin-Jones have argued that language choice by teachers – and students – in educational settings are concerned with more than merely acquiring linguistic proficiency; they are also about the distribution of linguistic resources and the values associated with these languages, with particular ideological, political, social or economic interests being realized (2001, p. 419). The question for Timorese teachers is whether they share the same vision as those indicated by the language policy of the MECYS. The policy directives present particular challenges for teachers as they seek to enact policy while working in the reality of a multilingual environment.

LANGUAGE PRACTICE IN CLASSROOMS

Of the small number of classrooms observed (eleven in total), five were conducted in a mix of Portuguese and Tetum; four were conducted solely in Portuguese and two solely in Tetum. The most significant finding was that there was no pattern between the subject taught and the language used to teach the subject. While the Portuguese language as a subject was taught using Portuguese and Tetum language was taught as a subject using Tetum, there was no consistent language choice for teaching other curriculum subjects. Mathematics, for instance, was observed being taught in both Portuguese-only and in a mixture of Portuguese and Tetum.

Neither was the written material language necessarily connected to the oral language choice: one lesson revised an examination that was written exclusively in Portuguese, while the oral revision was handled largely in Tetum, as exemplified in this passage from the lesson. Tetum is shown in *italics*, Portuguese is underlined.

Teacher: Ha...*Entaun, iha nee...* "O corpo humanos esta divido quantos partes?"

Ha...So, here... "The human body is divided into how many parts?"

Students: Trez partes

3 parts

Teacher: Hum... trez partes. Ne'e mak hodi bainhira fo bonus deit...tuir los iha nee quarto. Iha ne'e trez partes.

Hum...3 parts...that was a bonus...actually there are 4...here are 3 parts.

Manuela, Baucau

This practice of reading in one language and speaking in another was one thing that was commonly observed throughout lessons.

Portuguese/Tetum Lessons

The most common feature of the mixed language classroom was the practice of introducing content using Portuguese and then switching to Tetum, with the overall proportion of Tetum use much higher than that of Portuguese. Manuela's Portuguese reading class begins with formal overview of the lesson in Portuguese, but quickly moves to Tetum to talk about the content. Helder presents his explanation of reducing fractions in mathematics in Portuguese, re-explains in Tetum and then recaps in Portuguese. The teachers explain their practice:

Usa hotu, hanorin ho Portugues maibe esplika ho Tetum. Hanorin portugues no hatudu ho Tetum atu sira hatene nia naran no komprende diak liu tan

I use both, teaching with Portuguese, but explaining with Tetum. [I] teach Portuguese and show them with Tetum so that they understand the names and understand better.

Manuela, Baucau

...maibe em geral .iha buat barak mak sira la komprende, no hau mos tenki esplika ho Tetum para sira hodi komprende buat nebe hau fo.

...but in general students did not understand [Portuguese] well in many cases, and I need to explain in Tetum so that they understand what I give.

Helder, Dili

Portugués, maibé bele esplika ho Tetum

[We use] Portuguese, but we also explain in Tetum

Rudolfo, Lautem

While teachers are facing a very practical problem – that students do not have enough Portuguese to understand the subject matter – a differentiation exists between 'teaching' and 'explaining' in that explaining the topic is not regarded part of the act of teaching. This echoes some of the work of Arthur in Botswana, who noted the medium of instruction – English – took on a 'performance' mode, with

highly stylized rituals of question and answer and oration of answers (full sentences, standing to answer, voice projection), while the language shared by teachers and students – Setswana – was used as the ‘off stage’ language to bring attention to the task, to remind and recap past lessons in preparation for the new material (1996). In Timorese classrooms, Portuguese appears to be the language for the performance of education.

This is further seen in the use of Portuguese for written modes, while Tetum is only ever in spoken forms. In her science examination recap, Manuela ensures that the students understand the Portuguese terms used in the examination by asking for translations into Tetum:

Teacher: *Agora intestino delegado. Intestino delegado ne'e saida?
Now intestino delegado. Intestino delegado. is what?*

Students: *Tee-oan
Intestines*

Teacher: *Te oan, te oan oinsa?
Intestines...intestines how [which]?*

Students: *[mix of answers] Kiik...boot
Small...big...*

Teacher: *Intestino delegado ne'e ita nia te oan ida kiik, lotuk. Ah...agora
intestino groso...agora hare didiak, intestino groso...
ah...agora intestino groso ne'e saida?*

*Intestino delegado is your small intestine, delicate. Ah...now,
intestino groso...now look carefully...big intestine...ah ...now
intestino groso is what?*

Students: *Te oan boot,
Big intestine*

Manuela, Baucau

However, the Tetum words throughout this lesson are never written on the board, despite considerable discussion. Only the Portuguese terms are written for the students to copy. As with other teachers interviewed, Manuela never writes Tetum:

*...Iha nee mak nafatin deit bain- bain materia hotu usa portugues maibe
barak liu mak esplika ho Tetum.*

In this case, it's usual in all lessons to use [written] Portuguese, but explained with Tetum.

Manuela, Baucau

Ami agora ne'e ko'alia maka ho Tetum. Maibé ami hakerek ho Português. ... la hakerek ho Tetum.

Today it is Tetum we speak but we write in Portuguese. ... [we] don't write Tetum.

Rudolfo, Lautem

These comments are despite the fact that teachers see themselves as proficient in all language modes of Tetum, and express the wish for students to know Tetum well. Teachers have not understood that giving students the opportunity to read Tetum across all subject areas would enhance the literacy in Tetum as well as Portuguese. Perhaps because of this reliance on spoken Tetum to understand and the written Portuguese to record, teachers also noted that the literacy skills of students in Portuguese had not been sufficiently developed to handle the content of disciplines, as Margarida notes:

Sira hakerek ho Portuguese tamba hau halo bebeik trabalho de casa ne'e sira lahatene. Sira husu ho Tetum, maibe to'o iha uma ne'e, hetan ajuda husi sira nia inan aman. Sira to'o mai sempre ho Portuguese. Karik sira esforsa an para bele buka informasaun atu bele hakerek ho Portuguese, maske sala. Laos koretu maibe sei sala hela.

They write in Portuguese because I give them home-work they do not know. They ask [me to explain] in Tetum. But when they arrive at home, they look for help from by their parents. They arrive [at school?] always with Portuguese. If they work themselves to find the information they can write in Portuguese although with mistakes. Not correct but making mistakes.

Margarida, Dili

Teachers are struggling with this gap between content knowledge and linguistic knowledge. Using one language to understand the content and another to write it develops neither language to a proficiency that helps students learn the language or the content. Teachers are requiring further direction in strong bilingual approaches to teaching and learning.

Portuguese-Only Lessons

Lessons that were deemed Portuguese-only contained only very short instances of any other language, through an isolated word or phrase. These lessons tended to be immersion classes, with all communication including informal and regulatory comments, delivered in Portuguese. Rudolfo's mathematics class included the collation of students' test marks, where he joked with students about their results, all in Portuguese. Margarida, too, was conscious of using Portuguese in all registers in the classroom, whether in addressing content, regulating behavior or informal comments with students. She explains her motivations:

Emá dehan lian Portuguesa ne'e hahu husi kiik oan duni, ne'ebe hau halo toman sira para atu koalia Portuguese ona.... Nebe kuando hau tama sala hau sempre koalia liafuan Portuguese. Iha liur mos hau koalia Portuguese e tama fali mos hau koalia Portuguese, husu ho Portuguese.

People say Portuguese must begin small, so I made them to be accustomed to start speak Portuguese.... So when I enter the classroom, I always speak Portuguese words. I also speak Portuguese when I am out side, and when going back to the classroom also I speak Portuguese, and ask using Portuguese.

Margarida, Dili

These lessons tended to be characterized by teachers speaking slow and clear Portuguese, using the blackboard to write the new vocabulary. No translation into Tetum was made in these lessons, even those handling mathematics and science content.

Tetum-Only Lessons

The two Tetum-only lessons were quite different to each other; one that taught Tetum as a subject area and one that revised an examination (as previously discussed). What is significant about the Tetum subject lesson is that it is the only one in which written Tetum was used. It was also notable for the fact that the teacher, Rudolfo, made a number of references to Portuguese in order to teach Tetum. For instance, he wrote both the Portuguese and Tetum words for *know (someone)*. Although pronunciation is similar, Tetum uses a symbol to render *koñese* while Portuguese uses the *nh* combination in *conhece*. In this, Rudolfo used students' experience of seeing written Portuguese to illustrate written Tetum. This defies the usual language-literacy practice where spoken modes precede the written language. Students were probably first aware of the Tetum word in a spoken form, then had been introduced to the written form in Portuguese, and were now learning the written form in Tetum. This aside, Rudolfo's practice reflects excellent biliterate practice, since this strategy actually enhances the teaching of both Tetum and Portuguese by showing and explaining both languages. This same strategy was never observed within Portuguese/Tetum classes, where Tetum was only ever used in oral modes to support learning Portuguese and discipline content.

Materials Available in Official Languages

Teachers' usual response when asked why they did not use written Tetum was that they did not have materials to use. Generally, the lack of materials for teaching – particularly in the national languages – is a significant difficulty that faces teachers. Many teachers in upper primary reported using Indonesian materials and then translating these into Portuguese. The MECYS policy of only releasing the curriculum teaching guides year by year has meant that by the end of 2006, only teachers in Classes 1 and 2 have access to the curriculum documents⁴. UNICEF has

recently printed and distributed the complete syllabus documents to all schools, and the new policy for 2007 is that all Classes 3–6 will be provided with teaching guides in all disciplines in the new school year. As these are printed in both Portuguese and Tetum throughout, it will provide teachers with some language resources for all subjects.

As far as other materials available to teachers to support the curriculum, there are few available system-wide. Care International, under the editorship of the MECYS, provides all primary school students in Timor-Leste with a magazine aimed at their class level: *Lafaek Kiik*, *Lafaek Prima* and *Lafaek*. This provides reading material for students in both Portuguese and Tetum, increasing links to the curriculum areas and connecting these for use in classroom work through the accompanying teachers' magazine. The Mary MacKillop Institute and UNICEF have developed and provided reading books for primary schools, using stories in Tetum and Portuguese. Although other organizations are providing reading matter in the official languages to particular groups of schools in the primary sector, teachers are often without Portuguese textbooks or reference materials. In 2007, the MECYS have been distributing textbooks for teaching in some disciplines, notably Portuguese language, mathematics and *Estudo do Meio* (social sciences), and generally in the first grades. It is heartening to see that the teachers' guide for Portuguese language provides comprehensive teaching notes for literacy practice – that could be used across other languages teaching – and using bilingual notes in both Tetum and Portuguese. However, if the new shift in MECYS policy away from using Tetum as a written language continues, even more effort will need to go into producing authentic Timorese texts in Portuguese to support teachers in working with this language.

Mother Tongue Use

One area that is not addressed in any policy and yet is a reality for teachers is the place of students' first languages in the classroom. Contrary to UNESCO's longstanding Mother Tongue policy, reiterated in 2003, that initial schooling should occur in first languages (UNESCO, 2003, p. 14), Timor-Leste's education policy does not place strong emphasis on first languages of the various districts. There are no resources produced by the MECYS in these languages, nor training provided in using first languages for curriculum access. However, teachers recognize the potential for these shared languages, despite knowing it is not in accordance with official policy:

Fataluku uitoan de'it. Ida-ida dala ida, bainhira sira la hatene liu ona Tetum, ha'u ko'alia Português la hatene, ko'alia ba fali Tetum. Tetum mós sira la hatene, tenke ho Fataluku. Ne'e para sira hatene, atu kompriende saida maka ami hato'o, sira bele hatene liután.

Just a little Fataluku every once in a while when don't know the Tetum at all. When they don't know me speaking Portuguese, I would switch to

Tetum. If they still don't know Tetum, I must use Fataluku so that they understand what we are teaching and they can learn more.

Rudolfo, Lautem

Tamba dialek sira hanesan makasae labele tama. Ne'e sira edukasaun labele simu. Tama ho Portuguese e tradoso ho Tetum... Uza ba klase kiik, maka hanesan Premeiro Ano, Segundo Ano no terseiro Ano tenki tama ho Makasae para sira bele komprende. Quinto ho sesta klase labele uza Makasae iha laran.

Because the dialect like Makasae can not be used. The education department can not accept this...Use for small class, such as first year, second year and third year, it needs to use Makasae so that they can understand. Fifth and sixth year can not use Makasae inside [the classroom].

Agusto, Baucau

This considerable linguistic resource has not been harnessed as a means of literacy to support the learning of Tetum or Portuguese. Certainly, the work of the Instituto Linguistica Nacional to document first languages⁵ and other projects to produce texts in first languages⁶ could provide material for classroom language teaching, which would constitute more than merely an 'auxiliary' language instruction. This presents an opportunity to both enhance learning and value the first languages of the community.

CONSCIOUSNESS OF CODE SWITCHING PRACTICE

The main practice observed in this study was teachers' propensity to code switch, that is, the practice of moving between two or more languages to realize communicative goals. In his review of classroom code switching Ferguson notes three categories of motivations that teachers typically use to switch languages: curriculum access; classroom management; and interpersonal relations. He suggests:

[code switching is] an important, even necessary, communicative resource for the management of learning, especially for pupils with limited proficiency in the official medium of instruction (Ferguson, 2003, p. 44).

Thus, rather than seen as 'mixing' languages, the practice of code switching in teaching can benefit both teacher and student in terms of learning content and establishing working relationships in the classroom. Baker & Prys-Jones (1988), and Adendorff (1993) suggest that these practices should not be merely ad hoc and opportunistic switches, but rather strategic, with teachers understanding the implications of their practice to truly benefit students learning language, literacy and content. What does emerge from observing and speaking with teachers in Timor-Leste is that teachers are often not conscious of their own language practices in the classroom. Rudolfo explains:

Maibé ha'u la sente katak ida ne'e ha'u ko'alia Tetum ka ha'u ko'alia Português. Maibé tanba Português maka ami abitua tiha ona hanorin loroloron, ne'e duni ha'u hanorin Tetum mós dala ruma Português ne'e tama.

But I didn't realise that I was speaking Tetum or Portuguese. But because we are used to teaching Portuguese everyday, that's why when we are teaching in Tetum, sometimes some Portuguese would also come in.

Lautem

Furthermore while Helder shows that he is aware of students' understanding of the lesson and adjusts his language choice accordingly, his focus is firmly on content rather than any consideration of the language proficiency being taught:

Ita nudar professor kuandu hanorin ita hare sira nia en... be nusa nee sira nia oin nee, sira la komprende saida mak koalia sira la komprende saida mak klaru. Entaun buat nee mosu ba ohin nee.... entaun O direktamente mosu atu hau esplika iha lian rua nee.

We as teachers when do our teaching we notice the students hmm...how their faces look like, they don't understand what is explained to them. So what happened in my teaching directly comes to my mind to shift my explanation into these two languages.

Helder, Dili

While Helder here notes the importance of teachers evaluating student understanding of the lesson content, other teachers did not take into account the relationship between linguistic demands and content demands. For example, in Manuela's lesson revising the examination content, she used Tetum to translate Portuguese from the paper in order to correct the answers without any attempt to ascertain where the students' mistakes lay in the content or in the language of the questions. It was not clear whether the students did not know the number of provinces in Timor-Leste, or whether they did not know how to translate the question. Although using Tetum to discuss the answers suggested that the students could not do this in Portuguese (Manuela used Portuguese to teach in other lessons), what was not taken into account was how language proficiency affected their ability to answer the questions. This presents an important issue for educators in Timor-Leste: how much do students *actually* know and how much language do they possess to *illustrate* what they know?

Thus, teachers need to be aware of the complexity of the multilingual environment and its implications for content teaching. Teachers need to be conscious of the gaps between language knowledge and content knowledge as well as knowing how to enhance knowledge of languages through teaching the discipline areas. For example, when teaching mathematics, can students 'do' mathematics and can they use both Tetum and Portuguese to do mathematics?

In terms of classroom management or relationship building there was no particular pattern to language switches. Rudolfo used Portuguese to joke with his students about their marks and to give everyday examples of maths concepts and

Alexandre addressed all students one to one in Portuguese. However, Helder consciously switched to Tetum to amuse the students by likening solving maths equations to catching a bus or getting to heaven (ie. there is always more than one way to do both!). Helder explains this language choice:

Maibe atu halo be hau nia istoria hanesan be hau, nee naran sa, maneira ida diak liu ba atu hodi Tetum para sira bele komprende, Tetum diak liu tan.

But if I want my story to be in a good manner I will use Tetum to make students understand better.

Helder, Dili

Ultimately, how languages are used in classroom activities is being left to the teachers to negotiate.

CONCLUSION

Being a multilingual nation with aspirations to officially develop both a European and local language is not unique to Timor-Leste. There are many examples of post-colonial and post-conflict nations grappling with similar issues. As a result, there is ample research to draw upon and models for consideration. Timor-Leste could learn from experiences where translation methods have hampered the development of target languages (Lo Bianco and Liddicoat, 1991; Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo, 1995; Wong Fillmore, 1985), whilst also gain from studies that show the strengths of using two or more languages, including mother tongue, in classroom settings (Adendorff, 1993; Baker & Prys-Jones, 1988; Camilleri 1996; Lin, 1996; Martin-Jones & Romaine, 1987).

However at this point, rather than recognizing the scope of language and literacy practice and providing particular direction, the MEC has left teachers to negotiate these decisions. While it could be argued that the lack of direction provides scope to develop de-centralized practices, the reality is that this cohort of Timorese teachers possesses little general education training (World Bank, 2004, p. 47). Thus, teachers are asked to enact a policy for language that is very unclear without the background knowledge to do so. From speaking with teachers, it seems that both proficiency in Portuguese and specific language methodology to address the reality of students' linguistic knowledge is missing from teachers' repertoire of strategies in the classroom.

Yet what this does present for the MEC and the school community is an opportunity to explore what is envisaged for the people of Timor-Leste in terms of creating a bilingual and biliterate nation – one that values and gives place to both its official languages. The identification of best practice could be used to inform teachers. In this way, teachers could be helped and guided to provide the best possible teaching and learning for the students in their care, whilst offering the greatest chance of developing a well-educated, multilingual nation.

NOTES

- ¹ During the Indonesian occupation, Portuguese was often used by the resistance fighters as a means of communication since it was not readily understood by Indonesian forces.
- ² Whilst the exact number is debated, there are between 16 and 24 languages spoken within the districts of Timor-Leste (Hull 2004; Gordon 2005).
- ³ Names have been changed throughout the paper, locations remain as collected.
- ⁴ A UNICEF pilot programme has meant that a number of schools have had access to all documents across all classes, but this constitutes less than 100 schools.
- ⁵ See <http://www.asianlang.mq.edu.au/INL/index.html>
- ⁶ See <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/linguistics/projects/Waimaha/eng/texts.html> for examples of texts in the mother tongue Waima'a.

REFERENCES

- Adendorff, R. (1993). Code switching amongst Zulu-speaking teachers and their pupils: Its functions and implications for teacher education. *Language and Education*, 7(3), 141–161.
- Arthur, J. (1996). Code switching and collusion: Classroom interaction in Botswana primary schools. *Linguistics and Education*, 8, 17–33.
- Baker, C., & Prys-Jones, S. (Eds.). (1988). *Encyclopedia of bilingualism and bilingual education*. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters.
- Camilleri, A. (1996). Language values and identities: Code switching in secondary classrooms in Malta. *Linguistics and Education*, 8, 85–103.
- Ferguson, G. (2003). Classroom code-switching in post-colonial contexts: Functions, attitudes and policies. *AILA Review* 19, 38–51.
- Fishman, J. (1976). *Bilingual education: An international sociological perspective*. Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers.
- Hamers, J., & Blanc, M. (1989). *Bilinguality & Bilingualism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heller, M., & Martin-Jones, M. (2001). Conclusion: Education in multilingual settings: Stakes, conditions and consequences. In M. Heller & M. Martin-Jones (Eds.), *Voices of authority: Education and linguistic difference* (pp. 419–424). Connecticut: Ablex Publishing.
- Hornberger, N. H., & Chick, J. K. (2001). Co-constructing school safetime: safetalk practices in Peruvian and South African classrooms. In M. Heller & M. Martin-Jones (Eds.), *Voices of authority: Education and linguistic difference*. Connecticut: Ablex Publishing.
- Leach, M. (2003). 'Privileged Ties': Young people debating language, heritage and national identity in Timor-Leste. *Portuguese Studies Review*, 11(1), Fall-Winter.
- Liddicoat, T. (2004). Language planning for literacy: Issues and implications. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 5(1), 1–17.
- Lin, A. M. Y. (1996). Bilingualism or linguistic segregation? Symbolic domination, resistance and code switching in Hong Kong schools. *Linguistics and Education*, 8, 49–84.
- Lo Bianco, J., & Freebody, P. (2001). *Australian Literacies: Informing national policy on literacy education*, 2nd edition. Melbourne: Language Australia.
- Lo Bianco, J., & Liddicoat, A. (1991). Language use in classrooms in Western Samoan schools. *Language and Language Education*, 1(1).
- Martin-Jones, M., & Romaine, S. (1987). Semilingualism: A half-baked theory of communicative competence. *Applied Linguistics*, 7(1), 26–38.
- May, S. (2001). *Language and minority rights: Ethnicity, nationalism and the politics of language*. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Ltd.