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# OPPORTUNITY AND INCENTIVE FOR BECOMING BILINGUAL IN COLOMBIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR *PROGRAMA NACIONAL DE BILINGÜISMO*

[OPORTUNIDADES E INCENTIVOS PARA VOLVERSE BILINGÜE EN COLOMBIA: IMPLICACIONES PARA EL *PROGRAMA NACIONAL DE BILINGÜISMO*]

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo (PNB) seeks to promote English proficiency in Colombian society in order to position Colombia within world communication processes, a global economy, and an increasingly multicultural world. Using documentary and statistical data within a case study approach, we characterize the PNB as a case of acquisition planning and argue that some of the social conditions that bolster bilingualism are not sufficiently developed in the Colombian context. Specifically, we maintain that the number of jobs requiring bilingual workers in Colombia's labor market and the patterns of international mobility of Colombians provide little opportunity and incentive for developing bilingualism to the extent envisioned by the PNB.

**Keywords:** bilingualism, Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo, opportunity, incentive, language policy and planning, labor market, interlingual contact

## **RESUMEN**

El Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo (PNB) busca desarrollar dominio del inglés en la sociedad colombiana a fin de posicionarla en procesos mundiales de comunicación, la economía global y un mundo cada vez más intercultural. A partir de datos documentales y estadísticos, en este estudio de caso caracterizamos al PNB como un caso de planeamiento lingüístico de adquisición y argumentamos que algunas de las condiciones sociales que promueven el bilingüismo no están lo suficientemente desarrolladas en el contexto colombiano. Específicamente, sostenemos que el número de puestos de trabajo que requieren trabajadores bilingües y los patrones de movilidad internacional de colombianos(as) ofrecen pocas oportunidades e incentivos para desarrollar el bilingüismo en la dimensión que el PNB plantea.

**Palabras clave:** bilingüismo, Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo, oportunidad, incentivo, planeamiento y política lingüística, mercado laboral, contacto interlingual.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

During the last three decades several educational policies have been issued in Colombia to improve the acquisition of an additional language. These include, according to Usma (2009a), the English Syllabus in 1982, the Colombian Framework for English (COFE) project in 1991, the General Law of Education in 1994, and the Curricular Guidelines For Foreign Languages in 1999. In general, most of these efforts have sought to foster the learning of foreign languages, primarily English, and have concentrated on the classroom as the main site for doing so. The most recent of these policy initiatives is called Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo 2004 – 2019 (henceforth PNB), introduced by the Colombian government in 2004. The overarching goal of the PNB is to develop Colombians' functional language proficiency in English throughout the different levels of the Colombian educational system (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2005a). If the population becomes proficient in English, the official discourse reads, Colombia will become part of universal communication processes, a global economy, and a multicultural world (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2005b).

Although the PNB has generated a rich academic debate in Colombia, most of this discussion has centered on classroom-related issues, for example on the effectiveness and conditions of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Colombian classrooms (Cárdenas, 2006, 2007) or on teacher preparation programs sponsored by the PNB (González, 2007, 2009). Little, however, has been said regarding how the PNB fits within wider social phenomena that may spur knowledge of an additional language, such as the labor market demand for English in Colombia and the chances Colombians may have to participate in interlingual and intercultural communication. This paper addresses these latter and important issues.

Rather than considering the PNB in light of classroom-related processes (e.g. teacher training, students' learning) or critical theoretical issues

(e.g. power, inequality, ideology), in this case study we focus on the social ecology the PNB is part of (Shohamy, 2006). By *social ecology* we mean some of the social conditions, such as the characteristics of the labor market regarding English or the chances for interlingual contact, that may create what the literature on language policy and planning calls *opportunity* and *incentive* for learning an additional language at a societal scale. As Spolsky (as cited in Shohamy, 2006) explains, these aspects are the contextual side of any language policy enterprise, and become crucial for understanding and predicting its effects. Our main claim throughout the paper is that some of these societal conditions are missing or not sufficiently developed in Colombia, hence jeopardizing the achievement of the bilingualism goals the PNB has targeted for 2019. Specifically, we maintain that the number of job offers requiring bilingual workers in the Colombian labor market, as well as the present trends in mobility of Colombians to other countries, provide little incentive and opportunity for advancing bilingualism for the larger social goals envisioned by the PNB. In the first part of the paper we will summarize the main concepts in language policy and planning (henceforth LPP); then, we will describe the PNB and provide an analysis of the two societal conditions mentioned above. The paper ends with a discussion of the PNB and some recommendations to increase its chances of success. This paper is an initial attempt to deal with these important issues for bilingualism in Colombian and, as such, is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive.

## 2. KEY ISSUES IN LANGUAGE POLICY AND PLANNING (LPP)

Cooper (1989) introduced one of the most accepted definitions of LPP to this day (cf. Ricento, 2000 for a historical discussion): “*language planning refers to deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes*” (p. 45; italics in original). That is to say, LPP involves any attempt to influence how people

learn a language, the language system itself, or the role(s) language plays in society. The deliberate efforts Cooper talks about can refer to decisions made by governmental bodies (i.e. top-down LPP) or, conversely, to everyday language practices that challenge, change, negotiate, or resist such decisions (i.e. bottom-up LPP) (Shohamy, 2006).

## 2.1 LPP Types and Goals

According to Hornberger (2006), LPP is an umbrella term for three types of language policy: Status, corpus, and acquisition planning. The goals for each one of these types result from their intersection with two LPP approaches: The policy approach, which attends to macroscopic matters of society and nation relating to language form; and the cultivation approach, which deals with microscopic matters such as ways of speaking and their distribution. Status planning refers to decisions influencing the choice and uses of language by a speech community. At the policy approach level, it comprises the goals of officialization, nationalization, standardization of status, and proscription. At the cultivation approach, it includes the goals of revival, maintenance, spread, and interlingual communication (e.g. international, intranational). An example of status planning is declaring a language official, such as in recent language legislation in Sweden (Ministry of Culture, 2009). Corpus planning accounts for efforts to influence the structure of language itself. At the policy approach level, this type of planning includes the standardization of corpus, standardization of auxiliary code, and graphization. At the cultivation approach, it develops the goals of modernization, renovation, purification, reform, stylistic simplification, and terminology unification. The different attempts to simplify the Chinese writing system are examples of corpus planning.

Acquisition planning refers to organized efforts to promote language learning (Cooper, 1989). To this end, acquisition planning targets the users of the language in order to alter their language knowledge or the language capacity of the community they are part of (Spolsky & Shohamy, 1997). At the policy level, acquisition planning includes efforts directed to or through the group, education/school, literary, religious, mass media and work. At the cultivation level, it includes the goals of reacquisition, maintenance, shift, and the learning of a foreign or second language. A current example of acquisition planning is the Chilean policy to promote the acquisition of English through the program Chile Habla Inglés.<sup>1</sup>

Acquisition planning goals can be attained in three different ways, through overt or covert means (Cooper, 1989): by providing opportunities for access to the language, by creating or improving the incentives to learn, or by combining these two means. Providing opportunity implies creating conditions for language learning to occur, such as teaching the language in schools or encouraging the production of literature and learning materials. Providing incentive implies influencing people's desire to learn, such as linking language learning to job offers, as in the case of immigrants to Catalonia attempting to learn Catalan (Paulston, 1987). Whatever the means, historical evidence (cf. Fasold, 1984; Hornberger, 1994; Paulston, 1987) shows that, once opportunity and incentive are present, LPP acquisition goals may be more attainable. Although the cases these authors report were not driven by an explicit official policy, the interplay of opportunity and incentive found in them seems to apply just as well for cases of LPP in general, or for cases of acquisition planning concerning additional languages in particular (Bongaerts & de Bot, 1997; Payne, 2007), such as the Colombian PNB.

<sup>1</sup> see <http://www.chilehablaingles.com/> for more details on this program



## 2.2 PNB in Colombia: Ongoing debate

The academic discussion the PNB has generated, represented by the variety of journal articles and presentations in conferences and other scholarly meetings, has centered on classroom or teaching issues such as teacher training through the PNB or standard-based teaching and learning. For example, Herazo and Donato (in press) and González (2007; 2009) focus on aspects related to the teacher development program implemented through the PNB, whereas Guerrero (2010) discussed the images of Colombian English teachers constructed in official discourse, mainly in the document *Estandares básicos de competencias en lenguas extranjeras: Inglés* (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006b). Ayala and Álvarez (2005), Cárdenas (2006, 2007), and Sánchez and Obando (2008) study classroom or school related issues like the contextual relevance of the PNB standards, current schools conditions for learning EFL, and teaching methodology, among other aspects.

Whereas the papers fueling the discussion regarding the PNB are diverse, resulting from research or based on principled reflection, the majority of them concur in some of the possible weaknesses and challenges of this policy. For instance, Sánchez and Obando (2008) criticized that the policy has been built in a top-down fashion and that Colombian schools are under-resourced to be able to promote the proficiency demands of the PNB. A similar position was taken by Cárdenas (2006, 2007), who argues that the PNB's goals are unrealistic given the current teaching conditions in Colombia. Since the PNB standards were designed using the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001), Ayala and Álvarez (2005) questioned their contextual relevance. The contextual issue was also taken up by de Mejia (2006) and by Usma (2009a, 2009b). Whereas de Mejia contended that the PNB has overlooked the multilingual situation of

extant ethnic communities and minorities, Usma assumes a more critical-theoretical position and argues that the PNB' rationale is utilitarian and its mechanisms contribute to increasing inequality and stratification in education. Concerning teacher development, González (2009) calls for the need to ground professional development initiatives in local realities and knowledge, and Herazo and Donato (in press) highlight the need for sustained on-site professional development that is responsive to the affordances and constraints that conflicting educational conditions (e.g. policy, materials, accountability issues, beliefs, etc.) usually pose for teachers.<sup>2</sup> It is true that most of these positions have pointed to areas in the Colombian PNB that need revision and improvement. However, it also seems true that many of these voices have concentrated on weak aspects of the policy, rather than on an integral appraisal of it. To our knowledge, no research has yet been done that provides a balanced and comprehensive evaluation of the Colombian PNB.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This research followed a case study approach to investigate the PNB policy and two of its contextual factors. Case studies describe and interpret a phenomenon in order to develop generic knowledge (George & Bennett, 2005). As Duff (2008) highlights, the key principles in case study are its "boundedness or singularity, in-depth study, multiple perspectives or triangulation, particularity, contextualization, and interpretation" (p. 23). In this paper, the Colombian PNB constitutes the bounded entity under scrutiny, using a combination of data sources to answer two main questions: 1) what are the policy characteristics of the PNB? and 2) What are the social conditions beyond the school system that provide or fail to provide opportunity and incentive for the achievement of the PNB's goals? Several areas of inquiry derive from these questions, including the characteristics of the

<sup>2</sup> see also Quintero (2007) and Valencia (2007) for related comments.

PNB as a policy, Colombian employment rate and economic growth sectors, number of job offerings in Colombia listing knowledge of English as a requisite, and characteristics of mobility of Colombians to other countries and chances for interlingual contact.

Data for analysis came from official documents and statistics about the areas of inquiry just mentioned. Documentary evidence consisted of press releases and various documents about the PNB from the Colombian Ministry of Education, the PNB's official web page, and conference proceedings. Additionally, official statistics from DANE (Colombian National Department of Statistics), SENA (the institution in charge of technical education), and DAS (the Colombian National Security Department) were collected, most of them through the web pages of these institutions or through e-mail communication with the administrators in charge.

Since our aim is to discuss the Colombian PNB vis a vis the societal conditions that operate in a complex and specific historical context, we used Cooper's (1989) constituents of language policy as an analytical framework: "what *actors* attempted to influence what *behaviors*, of which *people*, for what *ends*, by what *means* and with what *results*" (pp. 46 - 47; italics in original). To this we added Hornberger's (1994) *under what conditions*, to account for the societal factors this study addresses. Although other frameworks for policy analysis are available (e.g. Sottoli, 2002), we used Cooper's because it concerns language policy specifically.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1 What Actors?

Although the Colombian Ministry of Education has been responsible for designing and financing the PNB, several organizations have partnered or collaborated with the Ministry for its implementation. These include the British Council, the Colombian-American Center (Cali,

Medellín, and Bogotá), the Fulbright Commission, the American Embassy, the International Bilingual Schools Association from Bogotá, and most of Colombia's public universities. A growing number of regional and local administrations (41 cases at the time this article was written) have also been part of the program in order to develop *bilingual cities* (Bogotá City Council, 2005). The number of critical voices, briefly discussed above, has also included institutional ones such as ASOCOPI (Colombian English Teachers Association) and Universidad de Antioquia.

The Colombian PNB policy has targeted the potential users of English almost exclusively. That is, the majority of PNB's actions have focused on students and teachers in primary, secondary and higher education, with an emphasis on professional development programs for improving EFL instruction and teachers' language proficiency. In sum, the PNB policy has centered on the educational system and on teachers and students as the most logical potential users of English (see Table 2 below for more details).

### 4.2 What Behaviors and for What Ends?

The overarching goal of the PNB is to position Colombia as a competitive participant in a globalized world. Accordingly, the PNB states that widespread knowledge of a foreign language will increase Colombian economic growth and competitiveness, provide citizens access to better job opportunities, and foster national intercultural awareness and openness. To achieve these goals, the PNB seeks to develop citizens who are able to communicate in English, at internationally comparable standards (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2005a, 2006b, 2006c). This general level of competence is based on the Common European Framework of Reference (henceforth CEFF) (Council of Europe, 2001) and the Colombian national standards that were developed from it. The goals the PNB targets range from the basic level in the CEFF (A1), to one of the highest (C1), depending on the population the policy is expected to influence. Table 1 shows the details.

**Table 1:** Language proficiency goals of PNB (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006b)

Levels according to the CEFF	Name of level in Colombia	Grade/level in which each proficiency level should be attained	Targeted goals for the educational system by 2019
A1	Beginner	Grades 1 to 3	
A2	Basic	Grades 4 to 7	
B1	Pre-intermediate	Grades 8 to 11	Minimum level for 100% for secondary education graduates
B2	Intermediate	Higher Education	Minimum level for English teachers and graduates from other areas
C1	Pre-advanced		Minimum level for newly graduated English teachers
C2	Advanced		

As Table 1 shows, the expected proficiency for the different levels of the educational system increases as the educational roles change. For example, the minimum targeted level for the last grade of Colombian secondary education (i.e. 11<sup>th</sup> grade) is B1 from the CEFF, corresponding to the pre-intermediate level in the Colombian standards. B1 describes an *independent user* of the language at the *threshold* level (Council of Europe, 2001). This means that 11<sup>th</sup> graders should be able to communicate in English, both orally and in writing, in different situations and domains such as those related to travel, work, school, informal settings, among others (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006b). For newly graduated English teachers, however, the targeted level is C1 in the CEFF or, what is the same, pre-advanced in the Colombian standards. Thus, newly graduated teachers should be able to both understand and produce complex and demanding texts and use the language “flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 24). The deadline that the Ministry has established for reaching these language proficiency goals is 2019 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006b, 2006c).

#### 4.3 By What Means?

The PNB has used different implementation mechanisms and strategies that cover three areas: proficiency standards for basic (grades 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>) and middle (grades 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>) education, a comprehensive testing system, and teacher training (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2005a, 2006b, 2006c). Table 2 presents a summary of most of the different programs and actions that the PNB had designed and implemented by the end of 2011 for each one of the three areas we just mentioned.

Table 2 shows that the PNB policy has targeted formal education in general, from primary to higher education. This includes EFL teacher training programs as well as English learning in other professional areas of higher education. The policy has also started to involve Normal Schools in order to train future primary school teachers to teach English. The PNB has included the regulation of language institutes and the courses they offer as well, which makes the CEFF compulsory for the preparation of English courses in these centers (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006a). As Table 2 also shows, EFL teachers’ professional development figures prominently in the PNB policy, seeking to improve teachers’ English proficiency and instructional ability. Results



from the diagnosis stage of this area showed that 65.4% of the 11,000 teachers that were evaluated had a basic level of English (A2), whereas the rest of them had either an intermediate level or, to a lesser extent, an advanced one (Cárdenas, 2006; Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2005b). A diploma course that has been offered to in-service secondary school teachers is another central action within this area. This course is offered in

partnership with universities and local authorities and is called the Teacher Development Program or TDP. The teacher preparation area of the policy has also included a nation-wide initiative to improve foreign language BA programs. As far as we know, however, no national unified data has been yet provided that reports the results of these two last actions and describes the conditions under which those programs operate.

**Table 2:** Summary of PNB's policy areas.

Area	Description	Main actions
Proficiency Standards	Constitute the criteria for testing English ability.	Definition of national standards based on the Common European Framework (CEFF).
Evaluation (testing) system	Definition of a coherent evaluation system that gives a realistic account of the level of proficiency in English of teachers and students at all levels of Colombian education, from basic education to university degrees.	Re-design of national testing for 11 <sup>th</sup> graders in middle education based on standards.
		Inclusion of an English component based on the CEFF in Saber PRO exam for undergraduates.
		Job-entry English test for public English teachers.
		Diagnosis of foreign language BA programs and implementation of 'Planes de mejoramiento' (improvement plans). Starting in 2011, this action targets Normal Schools in order to include future primary teachers.
		Diagnosis test to measure English proficiency level of basic education English teachers.
		Diagnosis of English level of teachers from institutions that offer technical programs in tourism
		Analysis of English component in undergraduate degrees.
Teacher Training	Design of a teacher training plan that improves both teachers' methodology and level of English.	Immersion courses to improve teachers' proficiency in English.
		Programa de fortalecimiento de las licenciaturas.
		Teacher development program (TDP).
		Regional English workshops to improve teachers' oral skills and use of teaching resources.
		Training to English teachers of technical and technological institutions.
		Colombia Aprende web portal, which provides various tools for learning and teaching English.
Other	Decree 3870 to regulate English courses at institutes.	Language centers and institutes have started the process of implementing the decree.

Concerning teaching conditions, most state schools are under resourced to provide meaningful and effective instruction, a situation that has been criticized by many voices in the Colombian academia (Cárdenas, 2006, 2007; Sánchez & Obando, 2008) and recognized by the Ministry itself (Cely, 2009). Added to this, English teaching in primary state schools is mostly done by content-area teachers who have a limited command of English and have received little training in language education (Cely, 2009).

#### 4.4 Under what Social Conditions?

**4.4.1. Labor market demand for English speakers.** Our analysis of the job offers available in Colombia through SENA, Computrabajo.com, and Elempleo.com suggests that the Colombian labor market rarely requires proficiency in English for job allocation, as Table 3 shows. Table 3 presents the total job offers made through SENA offices from 2007 to 2011 and the number of those offers that specified knowledge of English as one of the requirements for application.

**Table 3:** Job offers through SENA<sup>3</sup> requiring proficiency in English from 2007 to 2011

SENA Office	2007		2008		2009		2010		2011	
	Job offers	With English	Job offers	With English	Job offers	With English	Job offers	With English	Job offers	With English
Amazonas	139	0	121	3	110	2	211	7	110	3
Antioquia	23862	11	17772	9	17733	80	22927	75	15944	66
Atlántico	6416	7	7400	4	7903	9	8348	77	3613	42
Bogotá D.C.	54200	61	43584	55	38150	73	58116	2164	52290	58
Bolívar	3701	0	4852	1	4581	3	6933	18	3005	35
Caldas	4928	0	5465	4	5428	1	5372	2	3807	3
Cauca	2492	358	2315	0	2531	0	3760	0	1571	9
Cundinam.	4675	3	5506	3	7698	16	7671	5	5109	4
Meta	2993	0	4775	3	4065	1	5246	5	3791	4
N. Santander	5455	5	6845	2	6109	16	5858	12	3836	7
Quindío	2563	0	1867	0	1866	4	2481	213	2271	10
Risaralda	6113	6	7548	1	6649	8	7197	5	4761	5
San Andrés	746	27	1259	23	1497	0	1068	0	1141	0
Santander	10616	11	11951	8	13018	2	14506	14	7227	22
Valle	13117	1	11604	9	8332	11	13746	20	11217	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>166998</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>158220</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>154070</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>200351</b>	<b>2634</b>	<b>144742</b>	<b>293</b>

<sup>3</sup> This information was provided by the SENA through the Colombian Labor Observatory. For ease of presentation, we have omitted from the table all the SENA offices that listed less than 10 job offers in total for the 2007-2011 period. However, information for those offices was kept in the total for all offices at the bottom of the table. Data for 2011 includes job offers available until August of the same year.

As Table 3 shows, 493 openings out of 166,998 required knowledge of English in 2007. This amount corresponds to 0.29% of the total job openings for that year. In 2008, the amount of openings requiring knowledge of English decreased to 133 (0.08%). In 2009, only 234 offers requiring English proficiency were listed by SENA, corresponding to 0.15% of the total applications. However, we found a different situation in 2010 with 2634 job openings that required English (1.31%), the highest demand over the last four years. Until August 2011, these job openings amounted to 293(0.20%) a total of 144,742. Table 3 also shows that most of the job offers requiring knowledge of English have concentrated in Bogotá and Antioquia during the 5-year period analyzed. However, the number of offers has increased in Atlántico, Bolívar, and Santander during the last two years. Interestingly, the number of openings requiring English proficiency was high in Cauca during 2007, with 358 openings, and in Quindío during 2010 with 213 openings. Unfortunately, there was no data available to explain the reasons for these situations, nor for recent increases in Atlántico, Bolívar, and Santander.

An on-line query of the two major job-hunting web pages carried out in September 2011 yielded a similar situation to that found in the data provided by SENA. Of the 17,993 job offers posted in *Elempleo.com* at the time of query, only 6.75 % required demonstrable proficiency in English. The situation was less favorable at *Computrabajo.com*, where there were 61,352 job offers but only 228 (0.37%) of them included this requisite. Analysis of the geographical distribution of these offers showed that the majority of them occurred again in Bogotá and Medellín, probably as a result of these being the most populated cities in the country.

**4.4.2. Occupational rate and English proficiency.** Another important factor that influences the PNB goals is the occupational rate in Colombia. According to DANE (2012), the unemployment rate for 2011 was 10.8%, the lowest in recent years. The area currently offering the most jobs is

commerce, restaurants and hotels (26%), followed by social, personal, and community services (19.4%) and by agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and cattle industry (18.2%). From these, only the area of commerce, hotels and restaurants has been historically associated with the use of a second language (Tochon, 2009) because they are related to tourism. However, tourism in Colombia has not traditionally been a strong economic area and the number of visitors coming from English speaking countries still seems low. We shall return to this later.

**4.4.3. Chances of interlingual contact.** In this study we used the notion of mobility, understood as traveling, to account for the chances of intercultural and interlingual contact between Colombians and English speakers. Historically, processes of language shift have been associated with contact among people with different language backgrounds. In this respect, the analysis of the number of Colombians traveling to English speaking countries yearly, or the number of people visiting Colombia from those countries, suggests that the chance of interlingual contact in Colombia seems too low to trigger widespread proficiency in English as envisioned by the PNB.

Although the mobility of Colombians to other countries increased to 2.4 million for 2007, according to DANE (2007) the majority of those traveling or migrating (55.4% for 2007) did so to Spanish speaking countries like Spain or Venezuela. The migration of Colombians to English speaking countries represented 34.6% during 2007, the United States being the preferred destination (32%). This last figure, however, is not a very reliable indicator of interlingual contact for different reasons. First, the total number of Colombians traveling to other countries annually has been traditionally low, representing no more than 3 million people yearly (2007), which suggests that there is little mobility in general in a population of 46 million. Second, knowledge of English is not a requirement for traveling to the United States or other English speaking countries.

Besides, the number of Spanish speakers has increased dramatically in those countries in recent years, rendering knowledge of English almost unnecessary for communication in some areas (García & Kleinfgen, 2010). More data describing where people actually travel within those countries and the need of English for traveling to those specific places will be needed to arrive at a more detailed picture of this situation.

Complementarily, the number of visitors coming to Colombia from English speaking countries does not constitute a significant case of language contact, and therefore is far from offering a supportive atmosphere for bilingualism. Until October 2011, the largest number of international visitors, 775,272 in total, came to Bogota, Medellín and Cartagena. From these, 19.5% of visitors came from the United States, while 61.96% came from Spanish speaking countries in Latin America (DANE, 2011a). The unavailability of data concerning virtual language contact, such as the one that may be occurring through the internet, impeded a more integral analysis of this important aspect. However, the most recent statistics show that internet access in Colombia is not yet a widespread resource, accounting for only 19% of the population (DANE, 2011c). The chances of using English outside the classroom with others Colombians who speak this language seem to be scarce as well, since the number of nationals who speak this language is still low, only 4% according to the 2005 census (DANE, 2011b).

To sum up, the previous findings show that the Colombian labor market demands for English-speaking workers is low, that the unemployment rate is high, that some of the areas of major economic growth provide little support for bilingualism, and that the mobility of Colombians to English speaking countries and that of English speaking foreigners visiting Colombia constitutes an weak case of language contact, at best. The implications of this situation, as well as the characteristics of the policy as such, will be discussed in the next section.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The PNB represents an overt (Shohamy, 2006) case of language acquisition planning: Its goal is to promote English learning by focusing on its potential users. Specifically, the PNB attempts to increase the number of primary, secondary, and university students who can use English for communication. To this end, the PNB has concentrated on the educational level taking the following route: First, the teachers' and students' English level was diagnosed, this was followed by the design of the PNB in its three areas, and finally the different actions and strategies that each of these areas involved have been carried out (see Table 2 above). Seen from this perspective, the PNB constitutes a case of top-down, traditional social policy where a governmental body is in charge of planning, financing, and enacting a program to target a particular social process (Canto, 2008; Sottoli, 2002).

Additionally, the PNB policy has taken a problem-solving orientation to language planning (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). This means that it originated from an unsatisfactory situation in need of a solution, represented in this case by teachers' and students' low level of English and teachers' inappropriate teaching methodology. Thus, the PNB has been directed to "fix" the problem, as the official discourse reads: "After finding out about the English proficiency level of teachers and students, and about the methodology used by teachers, the Ministry and local secretaries of Education found deficiencies and decided to plan different actions to improve them" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2005a, p. 1). Whereas we agree that Colombian EFL teachers' pedagogic and linguistic skills are a major concern, the problem-solving orientation of the PNB policy seems problematic. First, this orientation overlooks other areas that have a crucial role to play for achieving bilingualism in Colombia, such as the availability of resources for teaching, time allocated to instruction, trained and proficient English teachers in primary grades (Sánchez & Obando, 2008), or the affordances



and limitations teaching contexts offer (Herazo & Donato, in press). And second, it unfairly puts the burden of the success or failure of the PNB on the teachers' and the educational system alone. In other cases of foreign language planning (see Spolsky & Shohamy, 1997), the initial diagnosis stage and subsequent implementation included the public, commercial, and other sectors. This contributed to generating governance (Canto, 2008) around the policy, adding many more hands in its advancement, and yielded a more realistic picture of the language situation that the policy was intended to influence.

The findings presented above suggest that the social factors analyzed in this paper offer little opportunity and incentive for developing bilingualism in Colombia in the span of time envisioned by the Colombian Ministry of Education. As a case in point, the payoff of knowing English is almost inexistent for accessing the labor market, since only a very small percentage of jobs require bilingual proficiency and most of them are located in Bogotá, Colombia's capital. Were this trend to continue, the desired bilingualism, if achieved, would be an urban phenomenon mostly, deepening the social educational inequity between cities and rural areas that has traditionally existed in Colombia and Latin America in general (De Ferranti, Perry, Ferreira, & Walton, 2004). The link of the PNB to the labor market is a crucial factor because, as Samoilovich (2008) points out, the success of educational initiatives to promote equity relies heavily on the availability of the jobs education is supposed to prepare students for. In this sense, we adhere to the position taken by different authors and scholars like Cárdenas (2007), Grin, Regina and Ó Riagáin (2003), and Shohamy (2006), and elegantly described by Cooper (1989): "No matter how accomplished the schools are in imparting language acquisition, they are unlikely to lead to the language *use* outside the classroom unless there are practical reasons for such use." (p. 161; italics in original)

As several authors have expressed (cf. Cooper, 1989; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Shohamy,

2006), language policies are usually carried out to achieve nonlinguistic purposes, the attainment of a better economic situation being one of the most common. The Colombian PNB policy seems to be one of those cases. In our opinion, this does not make the PNB lose its legitimacy or "most of its cultural and cognitive development motivations" as Usma (2009a, p. 133) has argued. On the contrary, economic incentives have been fundamental to guarantee learning of new languages by large groups of people in successful cases of foreign language policy, like those from the Netherlands or the European Union (Grin et al., 2003; Renique, 1997). In the case of the PNB, the economic payoffs of proficiency in English, given the minimal labor market demand for English-proficient workers, seem still insufficient to provide the necessary incentive for attaining the overarching bilingual goals the PNB has envisioned. This situation, however, may change in the immediate future due to Colombia's recent free commerce treaties with English speaking countries like Canada and the United States. Unfortunately, these treaties were in a preliminary stage at the time of writing this article and data are not yet available to describe the bilingualism benefits or drawbacks of such treaties in more detail.

Together with the economic reasons, mobility and the chances of interlingual contact provide incentive and opportunity for the learning of a foreign language. For instance, mobility was part of the rationale behind the declaration of the official languages of the European Union and constitutes one of the reasons why the learning of foreign languages is common and mostly effective in this context. With that in mind, the Council of Europe implemented strategies to account for the learning and knowledge of foreign languages (Tochon, 2009) such as the language portfolio and the language passport, or Europass (Council of Europe, 2001). Conversely, our analysis suggests that the mobility of Colombians and their chances of interlingual contact with English speakers may be too few and far between to provide opportunity

and incentive for learning English. The data available, unfortunately, impeded a deeper analysis of the type of interlingual contact that is facilitated by the internet.

The previous labor market and interlingual contact conditions, although unfavorable for bilingualism in the immediate future, do not mean that the PNB educational policy is inappropriate or that it should be abandoned entirely. Education, after all, is the main condition for development and poverty reduction in any society. Additionally, although the learning of English in schools occurs under little social opportunity and incentive, it might be the case that the proficiency that is attained in classrooms could become available at a later time (Ellis, 2003), under social conditions that justify them. What we mean is that educating for bilingualism in classrooms, if successful, may contribute to increasing the social capital of Colombians in the long run, provided the societal conditions discussed here and the quality issues associated with education in Colombia improve.

It is also the case that large-scale educational innovation takes a long time to have recognizable effects (McDonald, Klein, & Riordan, 2009), which may make it difficult to arrive at a conclusive position concerning the effectiveness of the PNB. We are also aware that the Ministry of Education cannot be held directly responsible for what happens at the level of society beyond the educational system. As the PNB officials have manifested, “very little will be achieved if the efforts for teaching the language do not match the explicit demand for English competencies as a requirement for jobs or for accessing higher levels of education” (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006c, p. 3). Our point is that the practical conditions of use Cooper (1989) talks about—and that the Colombian Ministry of Education recognizes— seem rather unclear in the Colombian case. Our call, then, is for policy implementation beyond the educational sector in order to generate more opportunity and incentive for using English, making the PNB goals more feasible. The next section presents some recommendations along those lines.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper was to describe and analyze the Colombian Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo (PNB) vis a vis some of the societal conditions in which it is nested. To this end we first presented a description of this policy followed by a conceptualization of it in terms of LPP and social policy constructs. We then discussed two of the current societal factors that appear to influence this policy in the Colombian case, namely the labor market demands for English speaking workers and the chances of intercultural and interlingual contact, a product of mobility. Our main claim has been that the current conditions regarding these two factors provide little opportunity and incentive to advance bilingualism in Colombia as envisioned by the PNB. However, our research is limited by the availability of data regarding both factors; a more detailed and comprehensive analysis of them will allow for more conclusive interpretations—for example, by comparing the need for English proficiency between professional and technical job openings or analyzing bilingual language practices through the internet.

We have also made clear that the state of affairs concerning labor market demands and mobility seems beyond the current scope of the policy. However, proactive policy action by the Ministry of Education in alliance with other sectors seems possible. The recent governmental initiative to develop a database of professionals who speak English appears to be a promising step in that direction (see [www.ispeak.gov.co](http://www.ispeak.gov.co)). Additionally, opening policy making to a variety of social actors may guarantee higher levels of governance that could increase the success of this policy. We would like to offer a few proposals regarding these issues.

As a social and public policy, the PNB could be improved if alliances were made with the commercial sector, one of the direct beneficiaries of bilingualism. This gains much more importance in a moment when Colombia’s commercial agreement with Canada and The United States will soon be operational. For example, companies that

would benefit the most from a bilingual workforce could provide economic incentive (e.g. cash bonuses) to bilingual employees. Additionally, and for the same reasons, the commercial sector could start privately funded initiatives to advance bilingualism in the work force and in the public at large, by contributing to increasing opportunities for learning English.

Additionally to overcoming the challenges associated with current teaching and learning conditions discussed by different authors (cf. Cárdenas, 2006, 2007), the PNB could spur the creation of innovative opportunities for students to use the new language outside the classroom. For example, community language centers similar to those the British Council promotes in different parts of the world could be established through partnerships among universities, local authorities, and national educational actors. Their role would be to take English use and learning beyond school walls, making it a social intent.

Unfortunately, the discussion this paper presents has been limited by access to relevant data and lack of consideration of other social factors that play a crucial role in language policy and planning. For instance, a study of the linguistic environment in which the PNB is inserted is necessary in order to improve the policy and avoid unnecessary competition for resources with minority language communities. Additionally, the opportunities that the free market treaties with the English speaking countries might offer need to be considered and realistically assessed. Furthermore, a more comprehensive study of the Colombian language use situation concerning English and other languages use is urgent. The inclusion of a more detailed language component in the next national census could be the most logical option to attain this goal. This last aspect could include a study of the language use networks, the realistic language needs of the commercial sector, and the identification of different socially based opportunities for encouraging a robust and comprehensive bilingualism policy in Colombia.

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