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A Tribute to Ofelia García

Cover Page Footnote

Colin Baker, PhD, was Pro Vice Chancellor Bangor University, Wales, UK (2007-2012) and Full Professor of Education (1994-2012). He is the author of 20 books and over 140 articles mostly on bilingualism, with specific interests in language planning and bilingual education. His book *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* has been translated into Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Latvian, Georgian, Greek, Vietnamese, and Mandarin Chinese. The 6th edition (2017) was co-authored with Wayne Wright (Purdue University). He was awarded the California Association for Bilingual Education Special Recognition Award of 2000 for Outstanding Research and Scholarly Activity. He was Editor of the *International Journal of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education* for 15 years and an Editorial Board member for numerous international journals.

A Tribute to Ofelia García

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As a tribute to Ofelia García, I describe five events in my life that were influenced by our meetings and collaboration. These events span the years of our first meeting in 1992 through my role to introduce Dr. García before her Keynote Address at a Bilingual Education & Translanguaging Conference in 2016.

Keywords: *Foundations of Bilingual Education* book, Ofelia García, tribute, translanguaging

My tribute to Ofelia García is in the form of five events. The first event is when we met in New York in 1992 to create the first edition of the *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* book. The second event is my acknowledgement of her in the first edition of that Foundations book (1993), including a passage in Spanish. The third event is an extract from a reference letter I wrote for her when she applied in 2002 for a post at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. The fourth event is about her coming to Wales to meet the originator of ‘translanguaging’ (Cen Williams) at a seminar that I had arranged. The fifth and most recent event is when I introduced Ofelia García before her Keynote Address at a Bilingual Education & Translanguaging Conference in 2016 and paid a heartfelt tribute to her.

The five events described in this tribute are snapshots documented through diary entries and portions from other professional and scholarly writings. They are also a film of a cross-Atlantic friendship over 25 years. I frequently asked her advice particularly in the development of the Foundations book across the six editions. We met each other’s families, and I watched her grow into an academic superstar. The five events will provide the evidence of this superstar status.

1. First Meeting with Ofelia García

Date: September 1992

Place: New York

Context: Meeting to discuss a draft of the first edition of a textbook *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*.

Description: Ofelia García and I first met in September 1992. I had been commissioned by Multilingual Matters to write a textbook *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. The book needed to be strong on United States’ bilingual education to help sales in the US. While I had read widely on US bilingual education, I needed someone to teach me ‘insider nuances’, and increase my political understanding of US historical and contemporary language and educational policy.

Mike Grover, the Managing Director of Multilingual Matters (with advice from Professor Viv Edwards) decided that the best Advisor / Consultant / Reviewer would be Ofelia García at City College of New York (CCNY). Through him, I got in touch with her by email. She responded to my many emails and individual draft chapters very warmly and positively across many months in 1991 and 1992. After sending her a draft manuscript of the whole book in April 1992, we arranged to meet in New York in September 1992 to discuss the final version.

Diary Entry: 13 to 16 September 1992

On the way to JFK to meet Ofelia García. Heathrow Airport in London very busy. Night before in London - no sign of the Queen. Just red buses and black taxis. Buy each of Ofelia's three children a chocolate 'London bus' as a present.

Nervous at meeting Ofelia. Mike Grover tells me that Joshua Fishman is reputed to have said that Ofelia is the only person who understands what he has written. So, she must be some intellectual. Anxious ... as she will be well in advance of my knowledge, especially of bilingual education in the US.

JFK: Ofelia very kind indeed. Meets me in her car at JFK. All the way from Pelham. Forget it is a left-hand drive car unlike UK and try to get in the wrong side! Not a clever start to the relationship. We chat easily all the way to West Park Hotel, 308 W. St., Columbus Circle, NY. Less anxious now.

Ofelia tells me Hugo Baetens Beardsmore previously stayed in that hotel when he came to meet her. In the footsteps of a pioneer writer on bilingualism. Slept well that night.

Ofelia takes me to CCNY. Attend two of her classes. Informal but focused. Teaches by using the life and language experiences of her class. Meet some of her Latino students who need employment to pay College fees while my students get all costs paid by the state. Very sociable and enthusiastic students.

Evening meal at Ofelia's house. Meet Ricardo who is instantly friendly and welcoming. Really lovely person. Three children all welcome me. Eric, Raquel, and Emma. We have a chat. Give them their presents. They talk in Spanish to Ofelia. Good to hear. Crickets outside talking loudly as we eat outside.

Down to business: we discuss at CCNY the draft chapters of 'Foundations'. In a most diplomatic and charming manner, Ofelia tells me my draft manuscript needs to develop a more political dimension, and include more sociolinguistic coverage. Correct. I enjoy learning about US politics, but sociolinguistics is a different language from my specialisms in psychology, education, and statistics.

Ofelia educates me about different US types of bilingual education. Has feet on the ground and is realistic. Our typology of bilingual education is refined. Need to credit Ofelia for that typology.

Back to the UK. What a lovely person: warm and friendly, welcoming and sensitive, generous with her time and expertise. I hope this is a friend for life, academic and beyond.

2. First Tribute to Ofelia García

Date: February 1993

Place: Publication of a book by Multilingual Matters (Clevedon, UK).

Context: Acknowledgement to Ofelia García in the first edition of *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*.

Explanation: An Acknowledgement in the first edition of the book (February 1993, p. xii) relayed my experience of the allocation of Professor García as Academic Consultant. This text is repeated below. Ofelia García later gently told me that she was at CCNY and not CUNY. But that is the only element that was wrong in this Acknowledgement to her. The acknowledgement was repeated in the second edition (1996).

Ricardo Otheguy, Ofelia García's husband, very kindly helped me with a paragraph in Spanish. We did this secretly, so the first time she saw it was when she was sent a copy of the book in February 1993.

Acknowledgement: At the start of the proceedings, (following the advice of Viv Edwards), Multilingual Matters perceptively appointed Ofelia García of City University of New York as Academic Consultant. Through the miracle of electronic mail, I received detailed, sensitive, wise and judicious advice on each draft chapter. Achilles heels were quickly spotted, detailed polishing was recommended, and cultural assumptions gently revealed. Professor García shared her powerful and pervading Language Garden analogy with me in the early stages of writing. Professor García also had considerable influence in the typology of bilingual education. A great debt is owed for her generous amounts of time and patience, both in scores of written responses and when visiting New York. The ideas shared, and her deep empathy for language minorities became a true learning experience.

Pocos lectores hay que sean tan comprensivos, entusiastas, perspicaces, y conoedores tanto de la escuela como de la calle, y tan capaces de saber criticar y al mismo tiempo saber apoyar. Generosa y entregada a sus estudiantes tanto como a su investigación, la Profesora Ofelia García supo enseñarme, de hecho y de palabra, por correo electrónico y por su ejemplo personal, como se puede combinar en una misma persona el elevado logro académico y el alto altruísmo personal.

[Professor García provided comprehensive, enthusiastic, perceptive and friendly cooperation, with efficiency and speed. She generously gave a constructive critical commentary with grace and gentleness. Benevolent with her students and colleagues, she extended this privilege to me via daily electronic mail. I learnt much from Professor García, not only academically, but through her personal example. Dedicated to the plight of language minorities, she elevates her academic contribution by an altruistic and compassionate personal commitment to bilingualism. (The translation to English was not given in the Acknowledgements of the first edition)]

Professor García was first introduced to me in a letter from the publishers. The letter simply said: 'I have been in contact with one of the present top-rate people in the States'.

So, have I, and I, totally agree.

3. Reference for a Professorship in Bilingual Education at Teachers College, Columbia University (New York)

Date: 24th January 2002

Place: Teachers College, Columbia University, NY

Context: Extract from my reference for Dr Ofelia García for a post at Teachers' College, New York.

Description: After February 1993, Ofelia García and I directly communicated by email. While the text was mostly about our publications, we also shared our children's development. I visited her again in New York and we visited schools together. She kindly took me to see Joshua Fishman, an unforgettable experience.

Ofelia García applied for a post at Teachers College, New York at the end of 2001. I was asked to write a reference. Following an interview, she was offered the post. From 2002 to 2008, she was Professor of Bilingual Education and Program Coordinator, Department of International and Transcultural Studies, Teachers College, Columbia University. Here is an extract from my reference letter.

Reference Extract: Professor García's writings show a considerable width of scholarship. There is no myopic examination of one topic in depth but a colorful repertoire of interests that include international bilingual education, language minority economics, literacy and biliteracy, urban education, social and academic issues surrounding bilingualism, the history of bilingual education, and multitudinous Latino/Hispanic topics. This immense breadth of interest is integrated and cohesive, with cross-fertilization from one topic to another. Such width of interest has made Ofelia a prolific author, including in recent times when the Deanship at Long Island has meant many new demands on her time.

Professor García has a remarkable, almost intuitive understanding of classrooms that creates very sensitive and empathic understandings of bilinguals, bilingual education and communities. Alongside this is a deep political understanding, with a highly insightful knowledge of the social, cultural, political, and economic contexts in which bilinguals are situated. This combination of concern for individuals and a profound societal understanding ensures research and writing that is both powerful and impactful.

Professor Ofelia García has much international experience and considerable international respect. She is affectionately known in Europe from Joshua Fishman's reputed statement that she has been the only person who fully understands his writings on sociolinguistics. She has very effectively collaborated with scholars from most continents and is certainly regarded in Europe as a scholar of international standing.

I could not finish without relating an episode. When Multilingual Matters Ltd., the major publishers in the area of bilingualism and bilingual education, wanted a comprehensive textbook in this area, they sought advice internationally for an

Academic Consultant. The selection criteria were that the Academic Consultant must be a top-rate expert on the subject, and someone whose academic career would continue to flourish. The first choice of the advisors was Professor Ofelia García.

I conclude by giving a strong recommendation that Professor Ofelia García be appointed. She has the teaching excellence, research track-record and grant-capture ability to be a first-class appointment. There are very few scholars of her all-round caliber in bilingual education, and Teachers College would gain considerably from her appointment

4. The Birth and Development of Translanguaging

Date: 26th July 2012

Place: Bangor University, Bangor, North Wales, UK

Context: Meeting of Ofelia García and Cen Williams to discuss ‘Translanguaging’.

Description: Between 2002 and 2012, Ofelia García and I continued to email frequently mostly about my requests for help with further editions of the ‘Foundations’ book. In 2012, the opportunity arose to bring her to Wales and the birthplace of translanguaging.

Ofelia García visited Bangor University, Wales, from 23rd to 30th July 2012. This was a Visiting Faculty Appointment located in the ESRC-funded (\$10 million) Bilingualism Research Centre based at Bangor University. A key meeting was arranged between Dr. García and Dr. Cen Williams, the founder of the term ‘translanguaging’ on 26th July 2012. Dr. Ricardo Otheguy, her husband, and two of the Centre’s key researchers on bilingual education, Dr. Gwyn Lewis and Dr. Bryn Jones, plus myself, were also in attendance.

Diary Entry:

Much awaited day. First meeting of Ofelia and Cen. How will a nationally acclaimed poet from a quiet, rural Anglesey village get on with my favorite New York academic? Local lad meets Latina.

Booked a scrumptious luncheon in the Pro Vice Chancellor’s rooms for us all. Lovely food and drink.

Simple introductions. Both Ofelia and Cen rarely shy, but this time a little. Some degree of mutual awe. Room full of smiles. We all realize this is an historic occasion.

Ofelia asks Cen to tell the story of the origins of the term. He says it was during a coffee break at a Teachers’ Conference in Llandudno. Probably George Hotel. Not sure of the date but probably around late 1980s or very early 1990s. Informal conversation with Dafydd Whitall (an outstanding Headteacher and late Director of Education for our Local Education Authority). Conversation in Welsh. They invented the term *trawsieithu*.

Cen then says he had a chat with me. Explained the idea. Asked me for a translation. My first stab was crosslinguifying. Afterwards, that seemed an awkward word, so told Cen translanguaging might be better. It stuck.

Cen then started to spread the concept of *trawsieithu*/translanguaging on courses for teachers. Grew and grew. I reported Cen's ideas in *Foundations* (3rd edition, 2001, p. 281f).

Ofelia then explains why she is attracted to the term, and suggests it can be generalized from classrooms to the everyday language of bilinguals. She seemed to worry that Cen might not like the extension. Wrong. Cen saw the point and the potential. Wonderful! Ofelia possibly relieved, and encouraged to extend and advance.

Some wonderful insights from Ricardo. Guess he has helped Ofelia develop the term as he is very perceptive and seasoned. Notice that all warm to Ricardo. Welsh rural and New York urban mix perfectly. Ricardo and Ofelia very adaptable.

We chat about bilingual education in North Wales and New York. Two-teacher and three-teacher schools locally and massive urban schools in NY are more than different. Almost total opposites. But classroom issues around bilingual education remarkably similar.

Piece of history made today. Noticed that a tip-top New York academic and a famed poet-cum-educationist might have been worlds apart. One driven by the plight of urban immigrants with many languages, while the other driven by the fight to retain the indigenous Welsh language in its heartlands. Both are driven by social and language conscience. Same underlying motivations. Both know that political action is essential and translanguaging has a positive political potential. Translanguaging to help English speakers use more Welsh; translanguaging to help immigrants use their home language in the classroom and achieve higher. Both not just academics but also activists. Separated by the Atlantic Ocean but joined by translanguaging and transformation.

5. 2016 Conference Tribute to Ofelia García

Date: 10th June 2016

Place: Reichel Hall, Bangor University, Bangor, North Wales, UK

Context: Bangor International Conference on Bilingualism in Education: 10th – 12th June 2016

Description: Ofelia García came to Wales again in 2016 following my retirement. We spent time together reflecting on language in education over recent decades. The reason for her coming was to attend a Bilingualism Conference at Bangor University.

At this Bilingualism Conference, Ofelia García and Jasone Cenoz both gave Keynote Addresses. Cen Williams, the originator of the concept of 'translanguaging' was also present. I was asked to introduce Ofelia García. It

gave me a golden opportunity to say a warm ‘thank you’ to her for all the help, advice, collaboration and friendship for over 25 years. Here is that speech.

Introduction to Ofelia:

You are about to meet the Queen.

Not Queen Elizabeth II who has reigned for 64 years but Queen Ofelia who undisputedly has reigned as THE number 1 leader of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education for more than three decades.

Ofelia was born in Havana, Cuba. She became an outstanding Cuban-American intellectual. Her origins are important in understanding her passion for transformative bilingual education and her deep social conscience. She came to New York as an immigrant at the age of 11 with her family. Her father was a professional lawyer in Cuba, but to make ends meet in NY, he worked very long hours in a Deli.

To fund her BA degree at Hunter College, Ofelia worked as a key punch operator. Thus, her understanding of bilingual education is rooted in the need for social justice, for giving all children irrespective of class, length of immigration or home language, the chance to share the many advantages of bilingualism and bilingual education. This is not Fifth Avenue bilingual education, but that of the South Bronx.

For those of you who have read her books and articles, she is an intellectual heavyweight. Underneath, she is a champion of the poor, the neglected, the deprived, the needy.

After graduating, she taught in an alternative high school in New York City and has been a Professor in several New York Universities. Her list of publications, honors, visits to many Universities around the globe, her academic and professional awards, journal editorships and editorial boards, keynote addresses at major conferences, puts Hilary Clinton in the shade and Donald Trump in the dark.

There are at least 21 books and several hundred articles. She is thus the undisputed heavyweight champion of bilingual education and bilingualism.

In September 1992, I travelled to New York to meet Ofelia. The reason for my visit to Ofelia was that Mike Grover (the founder and managing director of the publishers Multilingual Matters - his wife, Marjukka, and son, Tommi, are with us tonight) had astutely spotted Ofelia as THE future academic leader of bilingual education and bilingualism. I had been told on good authority that Joshua Fishman believed that Ofelia was the ONLY person who understood his brilliant writings.

So, I went to NY in awe of her.

I still am.

Through the five editions of the Foundations book, Ofelia has always given me superb feedback, being diplomatic and constructive, wise and perceptive. Diolch Ofelia [“diolch” means “thank you” in Welsh].

It is Ofelia that has made 'translanguaging' famous throughout the world. Her 2009 book 'Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective' showed how translanguaging was not just about classrooms and codeswitching, but is the reality of the integrated everyday language of bilinguals. She has developed the term so it makes bilingualism feel more positive, more politically acceptable, more about the power of people who speak two or more languages.

Ofelia: thank you for taking a Welsh concept (trawsieithu) and making it global: global in meaning, utilized across many disciplines, and now used across the world. Thank you, Ofelia, for returning to North Wales where the term was invented, and thus making this Conference prestigious.

To me, you are a Cuban intellectual, a globally famous American educationalist, ... and from today ... an honorary Welsh academic.

You valuably took the Welsh baton of 'translanguaging' and have made it world famous.

Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm Welsh welcome to Queen Ofelia García.