

Challenging the Monolingual Bias in EFL Programs: Towards a Bilingual Approach to L2 Learning

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Abstract

In this paper, I question the practice of reducing L2 learning (emerging bilingualism) to the acquisition of monolingual-like competence in the target language and advocate for *L2 users/learners' language capacities* to be understood from a holistic bilingual approach. Here, I discuss the implications of allowing this monolingual bias to operate unchallenged as I examine the experiences/opinions of language learners and instructors from the English Language Department at a public university in Costa Rica, regarding what it means to learn a foreign language and to become a bilingual speaker. Thereafter, I consider the challenge of ridding language education programs of this pervasive monolingual bias so that ways are found to allow L2 users/learners to stop characterizing themselves as deficient speakers of their additional language.

Key words: bilingualism, L2/L1 in EFL Classrooms, monolingual bias, bilingual approach to L2 learning

Resumen

En este artículo, cuestiono la práctica de reducir el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua o lengua extranjera (bilingüismo emergente) a la adquisición de la competencia lingüística equivalente a la de un hablante monolingüe de la lengua meta. Asimismo, abogo para que las capacidades lingüísticas de estos bilingües emergentes sean entendidas y examinadas desde un enfoque holístico que parte de la premisa que el bilingüismo es un fenómeno diferente a procesos de adquisición de una primera lengua. Además, con el propósito de evidenciar las repercusiones de utilizar el idealizado hablante monolingüe de la lengua meta como modelo por seguir, examino las experiencias/opiniones de estudiantes y profesores del departamento de inglés en una universidad pública en Costa Rica, respecto a lo que significa aprender una lengua extranjera y adquirir destrezas bilingües. De aquí en adelante, me dedico a discutir el reto que representa librar programas de educación en lengua extranjera de esta tendencia para así forjar espacios donde los bilingües emergentes no se caracterizan como hablantes carentes y deficientes de la lengua extranjera.

Palabras claves: bilingüismo, L2/L1 en la clase de Inglés como lengua extranjera, "monolingual bias", enfoque holístico en la enseñanza y aprendizaje de una segunda lengua extranjera

Introduction

The field of applied linguistics (AL), and in particular *Second Language Acquisition* (SLA) and *Bilingual Education* (BE), has largely operated upon the premise that monolingualism is the default for human communication and that the learning of an additional language later in life is to be examined vis-à-vis monolingual speakers' language competence. Under such assumption, the language competence of second language (L2) users/learners (or emergent bilinguals) is thus compared not against that of *other multilinguals*, but instead, against *idealized native speakers* whose monolingual upbringing granted them a superior language competence. These emergent bilinguals are, therefore, doomed to permanently inhabit a place defined by incompleteness, inadequacy, and deficit. On reflection, one unfavorable implication of this monolingual bias is that it causes L2 users/learners to question their linguistic ability in their L2 and to hesitate to consider themselves to be bilingual. More often than not, these individuals characterize themselves as 'only language learners' who are not quite there yet as they are still struggling to acquire the language competence of the idealized monolingual speaker, who still continues to be the language attainment benchmark in AL, SLA and BE.

In this paper, I question the practice of reducing L2 learning (emerging bilingualism) to the acquisition of monolingual-like competence in the target language and advocate for *L2 users/learners' language capacities* to be understood from a holistic bilingual

approach. Here, I discuss the implications of allowing this monolingual bias to operate unchallenged as I examine the experiences/opinions of language learners and instructors from the English Language Department at a public university in Costa Rica, regarding what it means to learn a foreign language and to become a bilingual speaker. Thereafter, I consider the challenge of ridding language education programs of this pervasive monolingual bias so that ways are found to allow L2 users/learners to stop characterizing themselves as deficient speakers of their additional language.

Theoretical Considerations: The Monolingual Bias

Since the inception of applied linguistics, monolinguals' language proficiency has been taken as benchmark in foreign and second language classrooms. This despite the facts that (1) these classrooms are sites where bilingual skills emerge and that (2) the emergent bilinguals inhabiting these sites are distinct speakers who learn the L2 under conditions and for purposes different from those of monolingual speakers. In a discussion of this trend of reducing emergent bilinguals to deficient L2 learners, Ortega refers to the ethical threats/implications of such monolingual bias:

When an impossible idealized native speaker competence is elevated to benchmark and arbiter of learning, the monolingual speaker norm not only frames and clouds data interpretations (a validity threat), but it casts a deficit light on the people doing the

learning (an ethical challenge) who are permanently defined and characterized by their second-rate ownership of the new language, their less pure form of linguistic competence (i.e., one that betrays their bi/multilingualism), and their forever lesser rather than perfect monolingual ability. (May, 2014, p. 37)

For decades, the focus has clearly been on inquiring into why emergent bilinguals fail to attain monolingual language competence in their additional language and not on the proficiency that bilingual speakers do accomplish. This overemphasis on bilinguals' 'inability' to conform to monolingual standards has (1) obscured our understanding of the processes and mechanisms involved in bilingual speakers' capacity to learn an additional language and (2) led us to ignore the totality of the linguistic repertoire with which bilinguals approach the additional language learning experience: *both L1 and L2*. Undeniably, emergent bilinguals are different from monolingual speakers in their knowledge of their L1s and L2s and in the cognitive processes involved in language learning, and for that reason, the former should be considered as speakers in their own right and not as deficient approximations to native speakers (Cook, 1999, pp. 185-195).

Clearly, narrowing our attention to what bilingual speakers 'lack' and the distance there is between them and the idealized monolingual speaker, has clouded our understanding of the nature of bilingualism, "[...] obscured the distinctive nature of the successful L2 user and created an unattainable goal for L2 learners" (Cook, 1999, p. 185). But over and above that, understanding

bilingualism in terms of the monolingual speaker has led us to define learners in terms of something they are not and will never be, which constitutes an aggression. In a study, Allen examines the 'subtle' racism that black middle class males undergo in the form of *microaggressions* –verbal and nonverbal hidden cues– that serve to invalidate black males' reality and to reproduce a sense of inferiority (2013, pp. 172-176). In a similar fashion, the non-nativeness labels -failure to conform to monolingual standards- allocated to emergent bilinguals' language competence only serve to question the legitimacy of their relationship to the additional language and to perpetuate feelings of inferiority. The aggression starts with emergent bilinguals being expected to develop a language proficiency that can only be accomplished by virtue of a monolingual upbringing in the additional language, a goal that, clearly, sets them up for failure and dooms them up to live a life of deficit.

Alarmingly, the monolingual bias is so pervasive that even emergent bilinguals describe themselves in deficit terms, thus contributing to the perpetuation of a sense of inferiority and deficiency. As the monolingual bias makes its subtle way into research, textbooks, and pedagogical practices, the native speaker standard becomes so much a part of the everyday experience and the discourse of additional language learning/use that its forces remain invisible. As the monolingual speaker standard influences foreign/ second language education programs and the way additional language learning/use is conceived/described, the practice of assessing L2 users/ learners against the idealized monolingual speaker

becomes naturalized, logical and commonsensical (Fairclough, 1995). From the top down, the discourse of the monolingual speaker standard has worked its invisible forces to establish particular ways of seeing and talking about the nature of bilingualism that marginalize the experience of additional language learning/use.

How the monolingual bias operates is evident in the terminology that is predominant in the field of AL. Unsurprisingly, the terms *native/nonnative speakers* are guilty in the question. On the one hand, *native speaker* signifies that the person had exposure to the language from birth and had a monolingual upbringing. On the other hand, *nonnative speaker* refers to a person who acquired language competence in an additional language later in life and who "...is imagined as possessing (or striving to possess) a derivative and approximate kind of linguistic competence, one that betrays itself in detectable traces of other languages during [...] language use" (May, 2014, p. 35). Unmistakably, the bilingual speaker is put in a position of disadvantage in comparison to the monolingual speaker because "It is by virtue of from-birth exposure to, and primary socialization into, only one language that the archetypal native speaker is imagined to possess a superior kind of linguistic competence, one whose purity proves itself in the absence of detectable traces of any other languages during [...] language use" (May, 2014, p. 35).

The monolingual upbringing ideal implicit in the *native and nonnative speaker* labels creates an ideology of language rights that takes ownership by birth as the most legitimate link between a language and its speakers and

assumes that a monolingual upbringing affords speakers a superior form of language proficiency. This ideology equates additional language learning to L1 learning and assumes that emergent bilinguals inhabit an imaginary world where what is acquired by virtue of birth can never be matched by what is learned in classroom contexts. Positioning native speaker competence as benchmark and taking additional and first language learning to be the same is problematic for research because, "[...] the bi/multilingual participants that inhabit SLA studies, once reconstrued into aspiring monolinguals of the new language, must be characterized by deficit by being less than a full language user [...]" (May, 2014, pp. 36-46).

Another term that needs consideration is 'fossilization' as it is also guilty in the question of the marginalization of additional language learning/use. Introduced to SLA by Selinker in 1972, the term was coined to explain why second language learners fail to attain native speaker language competence. Initially defined as the constant appearance of non-target-like structures in the learners' interlanguage, the concept later came to be understood as a permanent stagnation of language learning at all levels of linguistic structure despite the learner's ability, opportunity and motivation to learn the target language. Eventually, fossilization took on the meaning of language learners' ultimate attainment (Han, 2004, p. 214). Clearly, all three definitions emphasize on the speakers' 'lack of capacity' to conform to monolingual speaker norms either by describing bilingual's additional language use as filled with non-target-like language

forms or by implying that the ultimate language attainment of emergent bilinguals is a fossilized interlanguage.

Traditionally, fossilization studies have centered on explaining why emergent bilinguals' ultimate language proficiency fails to resemble that of monolingual speakers (Han, Z., & Odlin, T., 2006, p. 180). In all such studies, emergent bilinguals' language proficiency is examined in terms of how far it is from monolingual speaker norms, thus relegating to second place bilinguals' capacity to expand their linguistic repertoire by adding another language. This fossilization approach to L2 learning operates upon the assumption that language use that differs from that of native speakers is taken as evidence that emergent bilinguals have failed to become native speakers, as evidence that their proficiency is in a permanent unfinished state that never reaches a final form their and not as bilinguals' accomplishment in learning the L2 (Cook, 1999, pp. 195-196).

Taking the monolingual speaker standard as the arbiter of learning and positioning "...bi/multilingualism as a less natural form of knowing, doing, and learning language..." (May, 2014, p. 35) does a great disservice to bilingual speakers and to applied linguistics, second language acquisition and bilingual education as well. On the one hand, as bilingual speakers are described as deficient nonnative speakers struggling to avoid fossilization, to further their interlanguage, and to attain what is only attainable by virtue of a monolingual upbringing, they are led to feel apologetic that their performance does not match the monolingual speaker standard. On the other, as we continue to equate bilingualism to monolingualism

and focus on what bilingual speakers lack and the distance between them and monolingual speakers of the target language, we continue to fail to conduct studies that inquire into the nature of bilingualism and the mechanisms and process underpinning the learning of additional languages later in life.

All in all, I sustain that we should take a holistic bilingual approach to L2 learning that does not focus on why individuals who learn additional languages later in life do not acquire the same competence that monolingual speakers do but, instead, takes emergent bilinguals to be unique speakers in their own right and focuses on the processes and consequences of becoming bilingual later in life. The monolingual bias that still today permeates second and foreign language programs must be problematized and met with questions that can potentially inform curriculum design and instructional practices. Only this way, will we become able to:

[...] avoid the negative characterization of the overwhelming majority of L2 acquirers and users... as speakers of *interlanguages*... that is, as failed monolinguals rather than successful bilinguals... [and] also avoid the L1/L2 dichotomization in SLA and the related pathologizing of language transfer, mixed systems, convergence, and the interpenetration of systems, which are all central to language interaction in the ecology of multilingualism. (May, 2014, p. 8)

The Study: Setting, Participants and Instruments

As a language teacher and researcher, over the last few years, I

have developed a burning curiosity and sense of responsibility to examine the experience of additional language learning from a critical perspective, one that problematizes the 'common sense' knowledge upon which some language professionals base our understanding of the nature of foreign language learning and the emergence of bilingual skills. This paper was born out of that curiosity and sense of responsibility to question the status quo of an applied linguistics that describes bilingual education and foreign language learning from the lens of a monolingual bias that has created a deficit around bilingual speakers. To this end, I embarked in conducting semi-structured interviews with twelve language learners and five language teachers from two EFL programs at a public university in Costa Rica: (1) B.A. in English and (2) B.A. in English Teaching. The students interviewed were in their second, third and fourth years in their programs and the professors had a teaching experience that ranged from nine to fifteen years.

The interview had two main sections. The first one focused on the nature of bilingualism and required that the respondents describe the language proficiency of nonnative and native speakers of English and that they define what it means and what it takes to become bilingual. The second section centered on effective practices in foreign language education programs and required that the students and teachers provide their perspectives around the role English and Spanish in class and to evaluate the practice of translanguaging in terms of potential learning outcomes. Each interview took from twenty-five to forty-five minutes and the total bulk of data comprised

over nine hours of dialogue regarding the topics aforementioned. The interviews were conducted in English, but the students and professors were given the freedom to use Spanish at any point. Because of the focus of the present paper, however, most of the data herein analyzed and discussed comes from the first part of this interview. The patterns that emerged from the data analysis are discussed in the proceeding section of this paper.

Discussion of Findings: On Foreign Language Learning and the Trajectory to Bilingualism

The discussion presented in this section summarizes the perceptions and opinions that the seventeen respondents hold about the nature of bilingualism and foreign language learning. The over nine hours of recorded data collected for this study were examined vis-à-vis theory regarding the monolingual bias to identify consistent patterns, all of which were compared, contrasted and collapsed into the findings herein examined. As the discussion moves along, portions of the respondents' answers are cited to support each of the patterns scrutinized throughout this section. All in all, the findings of the present paper can be divided into the following macro patterns: (1) finished versus unfinished language proficiency, (2) foreign language learning as a never ending process, (3) bilingualism as double monolingualism and destination to be reached, (4) the affectivity of bilingualism and foreign language learning, (5) L1 and L2 as having an either/or relationship, (6) L1 and L2

as having a symbiotic relationship, and finally (7) reasons for the separation or interaction of L1 and L2 in foreign language learning.

When asked to describe the language proficiency of nonnative and native speakers of English, the participating students and teachers referred the proficiency of the former (bilinguals) as unfinished and lacking. In fact, they see emergent bilinguals as perennial learners, whose L2 proficiency is characterized by traces of L1 in their L2 pronunciation and accent, by a usage of simplified vocabulary and grammar structures, and by a lack of confidence, naturalness, and fluency. According to the respondents, L2 speakers' 'foreignness and otherness' is evident in how bookish and choppy they sound and in how often they have to stop mid-sentence, due to their deficits in lexicon, grammar, and confidence. Clearly, they operate upon the premise that emergent bilinguals struggle with and are identifiable by a deficit in their use of L2 in comparison to their monolingual native speaker counterparts. The next two interview excerpts comprise the essence of these opinions:

Native speakers do not see the language as a, let's say like a, like an alien part, like something they have to do. It's part of them, belongs to them, it's part of their essence, of who they are, they grow up with the language [...] And nonnative speakers, I think, they do think consciously about that other part they have to, they have to grasp, they have to learn, [...] they have to achieve [...] somehow there is this feeling of "I don't have it" and I have to do something to get it, and that's the feeling that nonnative speakers do not

experience [...] and even though, as a native speaker of Spanish, I always feel that I never stop learning my own language, but of course the feeling is stronger in the second language. There's this sense of ... uhhhh... 'not finished'. (Interview # 5, February 2014)

Obviously, the pronunciation, intonation and such, is very different from the one of natives. I think that's like the most marked feature [...] and also the vocabulary... sometimes we might... well, we might sound bookish, yeah, like not very natural when we speak, and when you actually go there and you interact with natives, sometimes they don't know a word you're using because it's not what they really use there in their everyday interactions [...] We don't teach sometimes, or we are not taught like those expressions that they use in their everyday lives that are not like very formal that is like the real English... (Interview #4, February 2014)

In retrospect, the respondents' deficit-laden characterizations of emergent bilinguals are nurtured by their understanding of the nature of bilingualism. Interestingly, they speak of bilingualism as a destination to be reached and a never-ending process, consisting of attempts at accomplishing monolingual-like competence in L2 (English). This perception clearly resembles the 'double monolingualism' ideal implicit in the monolingual bias. Point in fact, according to them, whether or not people can be considered to be bilingual depends on the extent to which their proficiency emulates the 'accuracy, fluency, confidence and naturalness' with which monolingual speakers of English communicate. Specifically, they refer to

emergent bilinguals as eternally having to continue to improve their grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, accent, and fluency. Some confidently state that native and nonnative speakers of English are different in that when engaged in communication the former focus on content and are stress-free whereas the latter center on accuracy and are always pressured by a socially or self imposed need for perfection (in relation to the native speaker ideal). They also ascertain that the language proficiency of monolingual speakers of English is comprised of the ability to use different registers while nonnative speakers can mostly speak in the formal register that they learn in the FL classroom.

[A bilingual person has to speak] perfectly both languages... uhhh.... for example, If I, I were bilingual if I knew English and Spanish perfectly... If I, for example, if I, if I had known the language in the US with native speakers, I would be bilingual cuz I know everything, English and I also know Spanish, I would say that... For me, a person who learns English is gonna be a learner, he will not be a bilingual person... (Interview #13, February 2014)

Fully bilingual is to be a person that is totally in command of the language, the culture, the body language, and, yeah the culture, the ways of, of, of the people, the society where the language is spoken... is totally in command of all those aspects... (Interview #15, February 2014)

When asked whether or not they consider themselves to be bilingual speakers, most report 'not being there yet' because of a certain feeling of deficit and of unfinished language

proficiency. Those who did say they thought of themselves as bilinguals completed their sentences with "... but I need to improve..." (See interview excerpts below). Undoubtedly, their answers echo long-standing professional theories on interlanguage positing that L2 learning requires individuals to move away from L1, since it is detrimental to their advancement towards the benchmark of L2 learning (native-like proficiency). As discussed elsewhere, this theory of language learning (interlanguage), which takes native speakers as the finish line, also states that L2 attainment for most L2 speakers is often far from this native speaker ideal, which leads to characterizations of L2 speakers' proficiency as approximations to native speakers of English. In addition to the respondents' hesitation to characterize themselves as bilinguals, they believe that 'true bilingualism' requires that individuals live in a country where the L2 is spoken. They report that such an experience allows individuals to acquire the idyllic native-like competence and the culture knowledge that characterizes true bilinguals. In this sense, one should observe that they visualize bilingual speakers as being equally competent, proficient and knowledgeable in two languages and two cultures. Any less than that would label L2 speakers as 'not there yet', 'not bilingual yet', 'still L2 learners' (See excerpts below).

Interviewer: So you consider yourself to be bilingual...

Student: Not yet but.... (Laughter) [...] Because I know that I need to learn more... (Interview #2, February 2014) What I mean that I didn't feel bilingual at the beginning was because I had to

think a lot about what I was gonna say... (Interview #4, February 2014)
 Bilingual? Ummm... I would say yes cuz I can communicate and I can produce what I'm thinking... however, I need all the experience and more courses to improve even grammar... pronunciation... I... my vocabulary is not that... big... (Laughter), so I consider myself as a bilingual when I can communicate. However, I need to work a lot to be a really successful, successful bilingual. (Interview #7, February 2014)
 It's like... like you never stop learning... So like I push myself... just try to be better... and people may say "But your English is good"... But I, my English for me is not good... my intonation... (Interview #7, February 2014)

Interviewer: So you wouldn't use the term "bilingual" for yourself?

Student: No, I wouldn't....

Interviewer: Then you would call yourself...?

Student: I will always be a learner... (Interview 13, February 2014)

Interestingly, an affective dimension arose time and again throughout all of the interviews as the respondents, speakers of Spanish (L1) and English (L2) themselves, pondered about their foreign language learning experience. This is not surprising given the respondents' tendency to 'other' themselves by pitting their own proficiency against that of monolingual English speakers and casting a shadow of perennial deficit over their L2 competence. As they reflected about their own experience as emergent bilinguals, they reported on feelings of fear and tension triggered by a pressure to avoid making mistakes and sounding foreign. These feelings, they ascertain, causes them

either to remain silent in L2 conversations, to keep their conversational interventions to a minimum, or to make silly mistakes. Further prompting to examine these feelings revealed that they are triggered by a generalized sense of deficit, insufficiency, lack of confidence in their L2 proficiency and sometimes embarrassment that their L2 bears traces of their L1. They report that this feeling of foreignness is inhibiting and emotionally chaotic. If analyzed in light of their own perceptions around the nature of bilingualism, it is no surprise that they feel as second-rate L2 speakers who will always bear a 'lesser-than-adequate' L2 proficiency.

When I speak Spanish, I am relaxed and when I speak English sometimes I am like nervous [...] because I am trying not to make mistakes, so I always worry about my words, my vocabulary, my grammar, but in Spanish, I just speak and that's it. (Interview #1, February 2014)

When I am talking in English, I, I am always thinking that it has to be perfect, I am thinking about the pronunciation and other things... in Spanish is different, I just speak in Spanish, I am not thinking in anything else... (Interview #13, February 2014)

Uhhhh... yes, I speak with my daughter, with some friends, uhhhh, with colleagues... but... it's difficult to speak in English with colleagues. I feel that some of them do not want because... uhhh... they don't want to provide, to evidence their Latino accent... (Interview #15, February 2014)

Uhhhh.... Well, I have seen those situations and what I see is... a nonnative speaker.... He's really... He speaks really... He's like... What can I say?

He's afraid of making mistakes or something like this... (Interview #3, February 2014)

When questioned about the interaction of L1 and L2 in foreign language learning, the interviewees' opinions were divided. While a few respondents believe that L1 and L2 interact in positive ways by creating linguistics awareness or serving as the basis for the other, most agreed that L1 and L2 have an either/or relationship that pits one language in opposition to the other. The latter ascertain that L1 is acquired while L2 is learned, where acquisition means finished proficiency and learning implies unfinished competence. They also describe L1 as their own and L2 as foreign, idea that they also use to explain why the L2 does not feel natural to them. Interestingly, they also state that one should not learn L2 if one is still acquiring L1 and that one should not learn two L2s at the same because one language is bound to negatively affect and interfere with the other. In addition, they claim that L1 interference in L2 proficiency can cause communication problems with native speakers and that for that reason exclusive L2 usage in classrooms is desirable as it leads to learning L2 in its pure form. In like manner, they claim that living in a country where the target language is spoken is the only way to erase traces of L1 in L2 proficiency, which, for them, seems to be vital for becoming true bilinguals. The excerpts below give evidence of the respondents' divergent opinions:

Well, sometimes, I guess that it just, it comes out naturally, you know, cuz it's not that I cannot say it in English

maybe... but that I'm used to use it, so sometimes I just forgot... and then the professor says "Please, use English".... So I go like "ok".... But it's not that I can't say it in English... it's just that I forgot or... I know I'm maybe too lazy... So I.... But I do use Spanish.... (Interview # 10, 2014)

If you explain something, if you say something someone didn't understand and you explain and you say "Well, you didn't understand, this is this, esto es esto, and you explain in Spanish...uh-hhh.... that's not good, your brain, your brain is getting lazy because it is not learning.... (Interview # 13, 2014)

Some of my classmates... they had the opportunity to go to the US... and they bring all this intonation and that American accent.... and I say "Wow, I want to speak that way".... or they have accomplished somehow that good English that we think is the one that we want... (Interview # 9, 2014)

Cuz we need to compare our second language, well, the one that we are trying to learn, with the one we already have, it's like the base, we have a base and we need to...uhhh.... on that base to build our second language.... so, we already learned one, so why not to learn another one...uhhh.... with the basic language that we already have, for me it's okay to use both... but sometimes I feel bad when I'm using both... (Laughter)... (Interview # 14, 2014)

When prompted to reflect about L1 and L2 in foreign language programs, their opinions diverged even more. On the one side, one large group of respondents vehemently opposed to the use of L1 in the L2 classroom by describing it as a bad habit that must be avoided in class because it damages and hinders

potential L2 learning. These people claim that even minimal usage of L1 in class can create an overreliance on L1 and translation, which, they agree, robs students of practice opportunities. In their opinion, exclusive use of L2 promotes learning and, thus, students must be forced to only use L2 at all times. On the opposite side, there is a very small group of interviewees who challenge these views by saying that it is okay to allow students to use both languages because it is what bilinguals normally do and that emergent bilinguals should not be made to ignore one of the languages comprising their linguistic repertoire. Right in the middle, there is a bigger group of interviewees that think that L1 has a place in the L2 classroom and that both can co-exist. These people agree, however, that L1 usage in the L2 class should be subject to boundaries. They think that L1 can be used for explaining a difficult grammar point, for defining idiomatic expressions, or for social purposes unrelated to language learning and/or language practice activities. These people believe that comparing L2 to L1 is a good practice because L1 serves as the foundation upon which L2 proficiency is built and that L1 is especially useful with beginner students.

I think it has to be in a combination of both [...] because I know that if you are learning a second language you have to get adapted to that language, but sometimes you need extra help [...] So I think that SOMETIMES it's better... uhhhh.... to have the both... both languages to learn. (Interview #2, February 2014)

English only... I think that even for beginners, you speak Spanish only

the first couple of days, like when you know that if they come from zero [...] I'm talking about the first... the very first days [...] Then I think it's absolutely unacceptable speak in Spanish in class. (Interview #4, February 2014) If it's beginners [...] you can use a combination cuz if not they're gonna be frustrated and you're not gonna see results, positive results [...] if everything you do is gonna generate negative, negative results and reactions from them... So I would say for very beginners, a combination of both [...] And for the other levels then... I think that for them it would be only English...and I think that would help them have better language performance because they're gonna be pushed to use it... they will start thinking in that language... (Interview #4, February 2014)

Student: Well.... We always speak more Spanish than English when we are learning... that's the truth, but it, it would be the best if we just talk in English....

Interviewer: Why? Why only in English?

Student: Why only in English? Because it makes us better...

(Interview #13, February 2014)

Student: I would say just English, but my experience... as a teacher... might change and I would say a combination of both... So it would be like 55% and 25%....

Interviewer: So you're sort of divided in your opinion...

Student: Yeah, I would say JUST English... BUT... It's really hard when you are in a class... (Interview #7, February 2014)

I disagree even when for example there is a class where the students are just at the beginning of their... of their

studies in English... I disagree with the professor speaking in Spanish... uhhhhmmm... for me, a professor must start speaking in English since the very beginning, the first day of classes, even if the students... there's students that they don't understand... because that's the way we learn... yeah... (Interview #9, February 2014)

Now despite these divergent opinions about the interaction of L1 and L2 in EFL classrooms, both students and teachers confess that in their experience exclusive use of L2 rarely happens or is hard to accomplish. They say that even in classes where the teacher has an inflexible and strict L2-only policy, language learners resort to L1 at times. Some students report that they do it because it just happens naturally and others admit that it feels awkward to use L2 with their friends when engaged in conversations unrelated to classroom language learning/practice activities. All but one teacher confessed that it is practically impossible to keep students using L2 at all times and that they as teachers themselves resort to Spanish judiciously and strategically at times when learning and/or comprehension depends on it. When questioned about their use of L1 and L2 outside of the classroom boundaries, they report that they also resort to both languages when engaged in conversations with other bilingual speakers, that this blending happens naturally and that they do it unconsciously. Clearly, what these respondents hold to be an ideal for foreign language learning—exclusive L2 use in the class—does not align with their behaviors when engaged in foreign language teaching and learning.

Well, I think that, that, we should... uhhhh... speak only in English when we are in class, but let's be honest, that doesn't happen... (Interview #14, February 2014)

For me that's kind of obvious, the students must speak all the time in English. We're supposed to do it all the times, yeah, sometimes we're lazy and then we are talking about, maybe not something related to the class, but maybe we are sharing something that happened to us with a classmate that's next to us and then we start to speak in Spanish and we shouldn't but we do... (Interview #9, February 2014)

As is clear in this discussion, both the respondents operate upon the ideas spread by a bias that pits L1 against L2 and sets a monolingual speaker of the target language as the benchmark in contexts where people are in the process of becoming bilingual. As a foreign language educator/researcher, I am concerned that still today we are forming bilinguals who see their L2 proficiency as unfinished and who are unable to say 'yes, I am bilingual'. As good as 'foreign language learning is a never ending process' sounds, it casts a shadow of deficit on the bilinguals we are forming, who will walk out of our programs feeling deficient because they hold the idea that bilingualism is a double monolingualism and that the traces of their L1 in their L2 proficiency are evidence that 'they are not there yet'. And what is worse, these bilingual speakers will walk out of our classrooms to continue to reproduce practices that pit L1 against L2 because they fail to see how both languages comprise the whole linguistic repertoire of emergent bilinguals.

Conclusions and Recommendations: Towards a Bilingual Approach to L2 Learning

Upon conscientious reflection, the patterns discussed in the section above call for actions to be taken to fight back a monolingual bias that is guilty in the question of classifying emergent bilinguals as second-rate speakers and describing them as perennial learners whose proficiency will always be an approximation of the ideal monolingual native speaker model. Clearly, expecting emergent bilinguals to accomplish a goal that is only attainable by virtue of a monolingual upbringing is an aggression that must be met with a new applied linguistics ready to see bilinguals as speakers in their own right and to understand that their language proficiency is not to be examined against unrealistic benchmarks. That said, this section outlines a series of actions that should be taken in working towards ridding FL programs of this monolingual bias and making way for a bilingual approach to the processes and nature of the development of bilingual skills.

Unfinished L2 Proficiency versus Emerging Bilingual Skills

First and foremost, scholars and language instructors should come together to get rid of the tacit but pervasive idea that bilingual speakers' L2 proficiency is never finished. This is largely accomplished by not using a monolingual speaker model as the ultimate attainment and benchmark in FL classrooms. Instead, instructors should make sure that the classroom abounds

with examples of bilingual speakers with diverse levels of L2 proficiency and who are able to carry out various tasks at different levels of success (native speakers included as one of the examples but not the only one). These examples should be coupled with the students' realization that those speakers' L2 proficiency is not unfinished or deficient but different in nature from that of a monolingual speaker of the target language. They should realize that various circumstances cause bilingual speakers to have higher or lower levels of proficiency in their L2 and that not only the ones who accomplish native-like competence in the L2 are successful. Furthermore, they should be able to see that their proficiency at a specific point in time is not representative of all they can potentially achieve – of a cessation in learning or inter-language. Instead, emergent bilinguals need to learn to see their communication potential as expanding and emerging as they continue to work on their L2 skills. Here the task should not be emulating a monolingual native speaker of the L2 but focusing on working fluency and accuracy for the purpose of clarity.

Ridding FL programs of this sense of unfinished-ness and replacing it for an understanding that emergent bilingual's proficiency is a composite of their L1 and L2, where their proficiency in the L2 is different in nature from their proficiency in the L1, will work towards improving FL students' confidence about their emerging bilingual skills and their communication potential. This view of bilingualism would allow bilinguals to see that any learning or improvement of their L2 is to be taken as an expansion of their

bilingual communication capacities. This view would allow L2 learners to see themselves as emerging bilinguals adding proficiency in their L2 to their complex linguistic repertoire, instead of as deficient L2 speakers struggling to accomplish monolingual proficiency in another language a second time around in their lives.

L2 Learning as a Never-Ending Process versus Expanding Bilingualism

Second, as well intended as the idea that 'L2 learning is a never-ending process' appears to be, it disguises the discourse that bilinguals will always be second-rate speakers of their L2 and hides the idea that they will never accomplish the proficiency of the idealized monolingual native speaker model. Instead of operating upon this premise, emergent bilinguals should be guided to see their bilingual skills (specially in their L2) as ever expanding, where L1 is the basis upon which L2 proficiency is built. This should run counter to the deficit paradigm upon which bilinguals' L2 skills are assessed in FL classrooms and should help emerging bilinguals to start to see themselves in a more positive light, where anything that is learned in the L2 is an accomplishment and not just an approximation to something they will never become: native speakers of their L2. This implies shifting our understanding of the nature of bilingualism from deficit to surplus and refocusing research studies from why bilingual speakers fail to accomplish native-like competence to centering on the processes underlying the proficiency that bilingual speakers

do accomplish in their L2. This also implies abandoning the interlanguage idea that in FL classroom, students must move away from their L1 (considered to be potentially detrimental to L2 learning by way of interference and negative transfer) and towards the production of pure L2 target forms (for which monolingual native speakers serve as benchmark). Instead, this bilingual approach, which is not conceived as linear, acknowledges the totality of bilinguals' linguistic repertoire and departs from the assumption that FL classrooms have a ripple effect, where the waves are ever expanding.

Bilingualism as Double Monolingualism versus A Bilingual Approach to L2 Learning

Third, this bilingualism approach requires that the bilingualism-as-double-monolingualism ideology be problematized. Instead of pitting L1 against L2, where proficiency in L1 is finished and competence in L2 in a perpetual state of deficit, this reconceptualization calls for rethinking and challenging the idea that bilingual speakers are hosts of two separate languages. For long, bilinguals have been subject to the pressures that bilingualism is about adding monolingual proficiency in their L2, despite the fact that bilingual speakers' linguistic repertoire is different in nature from that of monolingual speakers and that, as such, it must be studied and understood as a distinct phenomenon. In other words, it is vital that the complexity of the whole linguistic repertoire of bilingual speakers be studied as a totally different phenomenon, where L1 and

L2 are not separate but interact at two levels: (1) language learning and (2) language use. Since for emergent bilinguals their L1 and L2 constitute their total linguistic capital, in situations of language learning and use, both languages interact with each other in ways that are incomprehensible to monolingual speakers but only natural to those who have had the additional language experience.

This bilingual approach also implies that emergent bilinguals' bilingual capacities should be understood as ever expanding in both L1 and L2. This should lead also to challenging the idea that translanguaging is evidence of a deficient proficiency, laziness, semi-bilingualism. Of especial interest here should be coming to terms with bilinguals' natural combined use of L1 and L2 as they navigate the multilingual reality of the 21st century. Again, it is only natural for emergent bilinguals to rely on both their L1 and their L2 without a clear sense of diglossia, as it is context that determines which one language is relied upon more on particular occasions.

L1 and L2 in the FL Classroom: From Codeswitching to Translanguaging

Fourth, the idea that L1 has no place in the L2 classroom must also be challenged. For a long time, translanguaging has been demonized to the point that teachers have invested themselves in policing students around to make sure that they stay on L2-only use, at the expense of learning and communication opportunities. As evident in the data discussed above, both teachers and students still believe

that L1 is a bad habit in the L2 classroom and that L1 usage is detrimental to the learning of L2 forms. This is true to the point that in beginners classes, as the respondents report, students are doomed to undergo a silent period as their L1 is removed from the equation, leaving them mute and unable to communicate their basic learning needs, which triggers negative feelings of stress, powerlessness, and frustration. It is for this reason that it is important that this 'common sense' knowledge regarding translanguaging be questioned and that L1 be taken as a part of the whole linguistic repertoire of emergent bilinguals. This paradigm shift requires (1) that we reconsider the use of materials written/spoken in the L1, (2) that language instructors stop policing students around, and (3) that in-class instances of L1 usage be taken as learning opportunities and as necessary movements geared towards the expansion of bilingual skills. That said, what has to be clear for both scholars and instructors is that what we have in our FL classrooms are emergent bilinguals whose linguistic repertoire is ever expanding and not deficient L2 speakers who need to be pushed to use L2 only and to leave their L1 behind the door.

The exclusion of L1 from FL classrooms is so commonsensical for the participating teachers and instructors that the mere question around what role L1 should have in FL learning seemed farfetched and irrelevant. Some even expressed surprise that somebody would seriously entertain such question. As the respondents reported, print or aural L1 materials have no place in the FL classroom and translation is an ill habit that fosters

students' laziness and overreliance on their L1. These ideas, driven by the practice of pitting L1 against L2, are taken for granted and used as pedagogical principles around which FL instruction is planned and executed. However, a large number of studies have already demonstrated that the L1 plays an important role in the foreign and second language classroom (See: Tarone & Swain, 1995; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Chavez, 2003; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Gutierrez, 2007; Rolin, Lanziti & Varshney, 2008; Scott & De la Fuente, 2008; Inbar and Lourie, 2010; García & Sylvan, 2011; Swain & Lapkin, 2013). These empirical studies, grounded in Vygotsky's claim that language is not only a communication tool but also a powerful tool that mediates cognition and affectivity, have provided evidence of the usefulness of the L1 for the learners when engaged in complex and cognitively demanding tasks. Many of the functions these studies report L1 to have in the L2 classroom coincide with the reasons the respondents in this study provide for their use of L1 in the L2 classroom (translanguaging).

All things considered and in light of the data herein discussed, I agree that "It may well be futile to ask students not to use their L1 when working through cognitively/emotionally complex ideas, as they will do so covertly if not allowed to do so overtly" (Swain & Lapkin, p. 113, 2013). As reported by the respondents in my study, learners (and sometimes teachers as well) utilize L1 in class for a variety of reasons (dealing with a complex grammar point, explaining idioms, transitioning from task to task, etc.) even when both teachers and students agree that

L2 should be used in class at all times and despite the fact that instructors have strict in-class L2-only policies. Clearly, L1 usage is unavoidable and natural in ESL and EFL classrooms and so the recurring appearance of L1 in L2 learning/use (translanguaging) seems to be a normal and natural part of the emerging bilingual landscape and the second and foreign language experience. Thus, why do we insist on applying a pedagogical principle that theoretically makes sense but in practice is unreasonable?

Acknowledging Affectivity in Emerging Bilingualism

And last, an important pattern that emerged in the data analysis was that of the negative feelings that the respondents relate to the foreign language learning/use experience. And thus, special attention should be paid to these respondents' voices regarding this topic. To what extent should we assume feelings of stress, tension, fear, and foreign-ness to be a normal part of L2 learning and use? Or do these feelings arise from the students' immersion in programs that continue to perpetuate a monolingual bias that throws a deficit light on L2 speakers? But over and above that, what could be the consequences of leaving these feelings unattended and taking them to be normal? The idea that L1 interferes with L2 learning by leading to negative transfers fosters the idea that having traces of L1 in L2 is wrong and constitutes evidence of fossilization, is bound to make emergent bilinguals nervous, tense, stressed out and fearful about using the target language.

The feeling of foreignness triggered by the deficit terms used to describe emergent bilingual speakers' proficiency as deviant from the monolingual norm is bound to make them insecure and embarrassed to use their so-called 'inter-language'. All this terminology must be removed from the L2 learning experience to make way for other concepts that characterize L2 speakers for their ever expanding bilingual skills and the surplus that L2 learning actually constitutes. Ultimately, the L2 learning and bilingual experience should be an exciting one and a FL classroom that is as stress-, fear-, tension-free as possible is more likely to be a nurturing space for emerging bilinguals to continue to work on expanding their bilingual skills.

As a conclusion to this section, I have taken the liberty to share with you a reflection I once wrote about my struggle in coming to terms with the nature of foreign language learning and the trajectory to bilingualism. This reflection points to a necessary reconciliation between L1 and L2, to a bilingual approach to L2 learning that sees translanguaging as natural and beneficial, and represents a personal decision I made upon realizing that I am a bilingual speaker and not just an L2 learner:

As an English language learner, I was always advised to use only English monolingual dictionaries because 'having to read the definitions of unknown words in English would help me improve my English even more'. And in retrospect, I think it partially did, but at what cost? Back then, I did not even bother to buy English-Spanish bilingual dictionaries because they did not

compare to their mighty monolingual counterpart. Now as a ripe bilingual speaker and language teacher, I have made it my objective to use bilingual dictionaries because at the end of the day I am a Spanish-English bilingual speaker. And ever since I started using bilingual dictionaries, my whole linguistic repertoire -both Spanish and English- has gotten so much better, but especially Spanish, which I had neglected in favor of my 'L2' (I am using quotation marks because, in my head, as a bilingual speaker there is no L1 or L2, there is only a composite L). Now I am proud to say that I have started to become less and less the type of bilingual speaker who is frequently at a loss for words in Spanish because he bought into the scholarly concepts of L1 and L2 and into the discourse of foreign language learning being about silencing the first half of what really is an emerging and expanding linguistic repertoire. (My own journal)

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