

# Language, Language Development and Teaching English to Emergent Bilingual Users: Challenging the Common Knowledge Theory in Teacher Education & K-12 School Settings

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## **Abstract**

Popular views about language and how children and youth learn language are based mainly in cognitive approaches in support of a common knowledge theory of language development. This common theory feeds into the efforts to increase teacher and learner accountability as measured on narrow assessments of what it means to use language well and in academic contexts. I show how certain scholarship supports popular view of language and of first- and second-language development, and explore further the connections between the common theory and educational policies for teaching emergent bilinguals students and English learners. The article concludes with a discussion of alternative approaches to language and bilingualism, and particularly, what these alternatives mean for teacher education and practicing teachers who teach emergent bilinguals and English learners across disciplines. Alternative approaches include arguments for language learning as a complex adaptive system in which language emerges from localized practice, self-organizes in unpredictable ways, and co-adapts in a nonlinear fashion depending on the kinds of interpersonal interactions learning bring to and are afforded by practices.

## **Introduction**

Nationwide, it is well-known that the majority of public school classroom teachers are monolingual LI users of English (Gitomer, 2007), with minimal formal preparation in teaching emergent bilingual users (García, 2008) and English learners (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). It is also widely known in educational circles that the number of English learners in public schools has been on the rise since the 1990s (Allen, 2005). By the first decade of 2000, 20 percent all of public school-aged students (5-18) were considered to be English learners or emergent bilingual users of English (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004; see Valdés & Castellón, 2011).

What this national scenario of language diversity strongly suggests is that public school classroom teachers need to be much more knowledgeable about the learning needs of emergent bilingual children and English learners (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005; Wright & Sung, 2012). Now, more than any of time in the history of public schools, classroom teachers are being held responsible for ensuring the success of English learners in their classrooms; i.e., that English learners in their classrooms show English language development on standardized measures of English language proficiency along with content learning. And yet, it has been pointed out that classroom teachers already have common, popular knowledge about language and language development of monolingual children (Wong & Snow, 2002) because most teachers have learned in and about English throughout their lifetimes. What classroom teachers appear not to know much about, however, are the complexities of language, bilingualism and language acquisition, particularly as posited in the new wave of sociocultural theories of second language development in the contexts of bilingual and polylingual communities (de Jong & Harper, 2011; Faltis, Arias, & Ramírez-Marín, 2010; Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005; Jørgensen, 2008; Pennycook, 2010). The common knowledge that teachers do have, often translates into misguided practices and misunderstandings about bilingual language development: bad (non-standard) vs. good (standard) language; conversational (BICS) vs. academic language (CALP); and bilingual students as two monolinguals vs. bilingual students as dynamic, interactive bilingual users.

Accordingly, in today's educational climate of accountability, high stakes testing and sharp focus on learning outcome-measures, it appears that numerous teachers, particularly those who entered teaching in the past 10-15 years, and many teacher educators may be out touch with new scholarship about language and language

development. The new scholarship on the language development of bilingual language users (Karabenick & Clemens Noda, 2004; Hawkins, 2011) rejects popularly held top down views of language learning currently being promoted as the most effective way to teach English to emergent bilingual students and English learners. It takes the position that at best, the popular view is theoretically misguided (Larsen-Freeman, 2011), misunderstands and discounts the role of bilingualism in language development (García & Kleifgen, 2010), and relies on a narrow view of English-only instructed language education (Reeves, 2006). At worst, it argues that the popular view of language contributes to the swelling number of English learners who make little progress in English development as they move through the grades from elementary to secondary schooling (see Olsen, 2010).

### Overview of the Paper

This paper begins with claim that the general teaching force holds a set of popular views about language and how people learn first and second languages, and that these views are based on cognitive approaches that support a common knowledge theory of language development. I make the argument that these popular views dovetail nicely with efforts to increase teacher and learner accountability, the new education discourse. I also attempt to show how certain research-based literature supports both the new education discourse and popular views of language and of first and second language development. Next, I explore how educational policies directed at teaching emergent bilingual students and English learners support and are supported by the new education discourse and the common knowledge theory of language development.

The paper ends with a discussion of alternative approaches to language and second language development, a set of less well-known theoretical arguments about language and language development, and what these arguments might mean for teacher education and practicing teachers. Among the alternative arguments I suggest have important implications for teacher education and teachers of emergent bilingual students and English learners are that language learning is a complex adaptive system (Larsen-Freeman, 2002) in which grammatical structures and meaning (a) emerge from localized practices and repeated interactions (Hopper, 1998; Pennycook, 2010); (b) self-organize in unpredictable ways (Tomasello, 2003), and (c) co-adapt in a nonlinear fashion depending on the kinds interpersonal interactions, among other resources learners bring and are afforded (Larsen-Freeman, 2011); and because English learners are emergent bilingual users, their bilingualism, which is a complex adaptive system, needs to be viewed as an essential part of their language development. In other words, emergent bilingual users develop proficiency and literacy in English in school contexts from the base of home language practices through dynamic, interactive bilingualism (García, 2012).

### Popular Views of Language and Language Development

The current teacher force responsible for teaching emergent bilingual students, either in separate or heterogeneous classrooms, has been socialized in their homes and through formal K-12 and college schooling to accept certain popular views about the nature of language and how people learn languages. Among the popular views of language and language development that have been formally and informally taught with good intentions are as follows:

- (1) Language is a separate entity that originates inside the heads of learners and develops into an increasingly complex grammatical system of structures, which become the basis for how learners communicate thoughts and ideas.
- (2) Language complexity, fluency, and accuracy develop in a linear process, from words and phrases to simple and complex sentences; from halted to native-like rapidity; and from error-laden to error-free speech.
- (3) Knowledge of the grammatical rules of a language enables learners to master the language being taught; mastery means producing error-free, fluent language using complex language systems.
- (4) Mastering a language is facilitated when learners are explicitly taught the grammatical rules for using the language correctly.

All four views stem from a long standing cognitivist perspective of language and language development, in which the individual learner's capacity to develop language used in complex tasks, with fluent and error-free

speech ultimately depends on explicit instruction in which learners take in language, which is then used to generate language needed for new tasks at hand (Ellis, 1994). This perspective focuses attention on language as a separate, countable entity, which implies that it is not essential for teachers to understand bilingualism and its role in the development of English. For the purpose of this paper, I refer to popular views collectively as the *common knowledge theory of language development*. In very simple terms, the common knowledge theory posits that language is an internal code that is organized mentally through a Universal Grammar that adjusts to the specific language rule systems (phonology, morphology, syntax) of the input language (Chomsky, 1965; Harris, 1981). The complexity, fluency, and accuracy of the learned language develop interdependently in a linear fashion: Learners generate more complex rules from simpler rules, a kind of built-in syllabus; speech becomes more fluent, with fewer pauses, false starts, and repetitions (Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005); and errors decrease over time as the learner's language—the interlanguage—becomes more like the language being learned—the target language (Selinker, 1972). Gaining language fluency and using language accurately are a function of repeated practice, error correction, and attention to how rules work (Schmidt, 1990). Learners who internalize the rule system through practice, error correction, and noticing rules master the language; that is, the size, elaborateness, richness, and diversity of their developing linguistic system increases. According to this set of ideas, the best way to develop complexity, fluency and accuracy in the L2 is through explicit instruction of the rules of language, coupled with error feedback, over a range of language tasks that enable students to practice language, which in turn enables students to acquire communicative proficiency. An example of the enactment of this common knowledge can be seen in the traditions of how foreign languages and English for newcomers are taught.

This common knowledge theory of language development has directly and indirectly informed educational policies, such as NCLB derivatives and state level language policies, particularly in states such as California and Arizona, where there are large numbers of English learner students and English-only policies (see Arias & Faltis, 2012). In many instances, schools interpret these educational policies as a reason to mandate teachers to explicitly teach and correct language forms to English learners, which are then assessed on English language tests leveled by proficiency along a linear order of development, from novice, basic, intermediate to advanced levels of proficiency.

### **Language Development and Teacher Quality**

Under NCLB legislature and new state language policies, teacher effectiveness has become a central focus of the national dialogue on educational reform, and teacher education programs are being scrutinized (e.g., The National Council on Teacher Quality is conducting an evaluation of all teacher education program in the U.S., and rating them according their own criteria) and held accountable by school districts for preparing teachers who can ensure that English learners in their classrooms become fully and flawlessly proficient in English. Under the mandates, the common knowledge theory of language development have been appropriated as part of the new educational discourse about second language development aimed at improving language and academic assessment scores (García & Kleifgen, 2010).

Teacher educators and classroom teachers are being pressured, and in some cases directly ordered to explicitly teach English learners language forms and language functions in order to meet language-learning objectives, English language proficiency standards, academic standards, and ultimately, to raise each school's Academic Performance Index, as required by NCLB legislature. This new educational discourse has been informed by a small number of language education specialists from the field of instructed second language education who draw mainly from cognitive approaches to language and language development listed above. Many of the specialists are either anti-bilingual education, English-only advocates (e.g., Clark, 1999; Rossell & Baker, 1996) or tend to view language development strictly from a second language perspective (e.g., Ellis, 2005; Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010).

### **Educational Discourse and What Teachers Need to Know about Language**

The beginnings of the new educational discourse on what teachers need to know about language teaching and accordingly, and what teacher educators should teach them can be traced back to a position paper written by Lily Wong Fillmore and Catherine Snow (2000), which subsequently published as the opening chapter of *What Teachers Need to Know about Language* (Temple, Adger, Snow, & Christian, 2002). Wong Fillmore, a preeminent L2 acquisition expert, and Snow, a noted cognitivist, lament that "...poor language outcomes for English language learners in California and elsewhere could have been avoided had teachers known enough about conditions for successful second language learning to provide explicit instruction in English" (2002, p. 32-33).

Among the many conditions Wong Fillmore and Snow (2002) cover in their chapter as important for teachers to know (e.g., differences between vernacular dialect and standard English, literacy and spelling), the ones that receive much attention are (a) explicit attention to language forms, (b) the need to explicitly teach language forms and uses to English learners, and (c) an increased focus on academic language over social language. They proclaim that, "Often, explicit teaching of language structures and uses is the most effective way to help learners" (p.29).

Research in support of Wong Fillmore and Snow's (2002) endorsement of explicit instruction and attention to language forms and uses appeared the same year as their paper. In a highly cited meta-analysis of the effectiveness of explicit and implicit language teaching, Norris and Ortega (2000) concluded that explicit language instruction was more effective than implicit language instruction (The following analysis of Norris & Ortega (2000) paraphrases a summary of the study by Valdés, Capitelli, & Alvarez, 2011, p. 28).

Norris and Ortega (2000) reviewed 77 experimental and quasi-experimental studies that related instructional approach to language outcomes as measured by metalinguistic judgments about language, discrete-point responses, constructed, or open responses. Norris and Ortega distinguished between studies that had a focus on form (FonF), that is, focus on form was tied to interaction, in order to clarify meaning, and studies that focused on forms (FonFS), where the focus was on explicit forms without attention to meaning or to specific learner conversational needs. They defined instruction as explicit if teachers explained rules or asked students to pay attention to rules and come up with their own understanding of the rule. On the basis of their meta-analysis, the conclusion they offered was that learners who made the greatest gains in language proficiency learned in classes where teachers relied on explicit instruction that focused on language forms (FonFS). However, they cautioned readers with the caveat that "measurement of change induced by instruction is typically carried out on instruments that seem to favor more explicit memory-based performance" (p. 483). In other words, if language learning is measured by assessments that call on learners to show they have memorized specific language forms, then it is safe to conclude that students who learn language this way will show improvement over time if they received explicit instruction about language forms (FoFS).

Of the 77 studies Norris and Ortega included in their meta-analysis, 51 (two-thirds) of the studies were conducted at the college level, 5 were conducted on high school English learner classrooms, 10 were done in junior high school classrooms, and just 1 came from an elementary classroom setting. Moreover, Norris and Ortega included studies that reported minimal information concerning variation in language proficiency within the treatment settings. Evidence for language development depended mainly on how well students performed on discrete-point assessments that focused on specific linguistic features: "90% of the dependent variables [used in the analysis] required the application of L2 rules in highly focused and discrete ways, while only 10 % of the dependent variables required relatively free productive use of the L2" (Norris & Ortega, 2000, p. 483). In less opaque terms, the studies selected for inclusion in this meta-analysis included mainly adult, college learners (many from outside the U.S.) and mainly measured language learning with discrete-point language tests.

Findings from the Norris and Ortega study have been interpreted widely in recent educational literature on research-based approaches to teaching English learners in public school contexts. For example, Dutro and Kinsella (2010) writing on English language development in grades 6-12 declare unabashedly: "There is *ample evidence* [my emphasis] that providing carefully planned lessons explicitly addressing specific aspects of the second language is far more productive than merely exposing students to abundant English and incidentally addressing specific forms" (p. 169). For them, exposing students to English matters for helping students interact with meaning to become socially fluent: "Meaning-focused exposure to a second language through communicative activities allows students to develop greater oral fluency and confidence" (p. 169). But, they caution that students who

learn English through communicative-based activities “may never acquire [my emphasis] many critical linguistic forms and have persistent difficulties with pronunciation as well as with morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic features of the second language” (Dutro & Kinsella, 2010, p. 170). The evidence they provide for these claims comes from the conclusions drawn by the Norris and Ortega (2000) meta-analysis and the position on explicit language teaching espoused by Wong Fillmore and Snow (2000).

In a synthesis of educational research on teaching English learners in K-12 settings, Saunders and Goldenberg (2010) rely heavily on the Norris and Ortega, but are more careful than Dutro and Kinsella (2010) in making claims for the strength of the evidence with respect to implications for the kinds of knowledge and practice teacher educators should draw on for preparing teachers of English learners. They present 11 guidelines, based on “good evidence” (p. 59) for what schools and teachers need to do to provide effective instruction for English learners, with the implication that teacher educators should promote their guidelines.

Two of the 11 guidelines for improving English language instruction they propose are their “best guesses” (p. 59) based on the research they reviewed. Their guideline 5 states that, “ELD instruction should explicitly teach elements of English (e.g. vocabulary, syntax, grammar, functions, and conventions)” (p. 60). They admit that the guideline “has a strong supportive body of evidence, but few of the studies were conducted with U.S. with English learners in the K-12 or use outcome measures that are good gauges of language proficiency; instead, most use narrow assessments that measure specific language features...” (p. 61). Their guideline 6 proposes that, “ELD instruction should integrate meaning and communication to support explicit teaching of language” (p. 60), combining explicit instruction that focuses on forms, with communicative, authentic uses of language in the classroom along with a focus on form and use. They caution readers that there is “no definite empirical research answer about the appropriate balance and exact relationship among these elements” (p.61). Based on the research evidence they cite for this guideline (Norris & Ortega, 2000), coupled with guideline 5, it appears that the message to teachers is to err on the side of explicitly teaching English learners with a focus on form, even if the research evidence comes from studies that do not reflect the contexts of U.S. public school languages.

None of the guidelines Saunders and Goldenberg (2010) propose for teaching English learners mentions using the students’ first language, translanguaging, or dynamic uses of two languages (García, Flores & Woodsley, 2012; García & Kleifen, 2010) for promoting English language development. In other words, because the students’ L1 and L1/L2 language abilities are not mentioned in the work, their relevance to a teachers’ knowledge framework about how best serve the language and educational needs of emergent bilingual students is left unexamined and thus, presumably of little or no importance for teachers.

### **State Policies About Teaching English to Emergent Bilingual Students**

Within current climate of accountability, state-sponsored educational and language-related policies about teaching emergent bilingual students and English learners ignore the irrelevance of the educational research on instructed second language teaching for K-12 U.S. classroom settings or for developing bilingualism among emergent bilingual users. Rather, the policies align uncritically with common knowledge theory language development and the new education discourse about needing to hold teachers and teacher educators accountable for developing English in the English learners they teach.

In Arizona, California and other states, policies concerning language teaching call for English language instruction that focuses on form through direct instruction and error correction over approaches that promote content-based meaningful communication in L1 and L2. For example, in Arizona, all teachers are required to have a Structured English Immersion (SEI) endorsement on top of their elementary or secondary teaching credential (Arias & Faltis, 2012). The curriculum for this English-only endorsement is heavily slanted toward explicit teaching of language forms in sequential order, providing corrective feedback, and teaching English separately from other content areas (Murri, Markos, & Estrella-Silva, 2012). The state also mandates separate classes for English learners who test below proficient, as measured by the AZELLA. In SEI classes, students must study the language forms of English (e.g., morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics) and are expected to produce error-free language, ideally within one academic year. Students can exit from these English-focused classes and join “regular” classrooms, only upon earning a composite score of Proficient across listening, speaking, reading

and writing on the AZELLA test. August, Goldenberg, and Rueda (2010) question the legitimacy of this form of SEI for teaching English learners.

In California, English learners who score below advanced on the CELDT language proficiency exam are required to study English as a language 45 minutes a day, taught by an English language development specialist. For the remainder of the school day, students are placed with credentialed teachers who have been minimally prepared to teach English learners. All California credentialed teachers are required to earn a Cross-Cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD) certification, either through a series of examinations or by taking specific coursework (typically 2-3 college courses) in which CLAD standards are addressed in an approved teacher preparation program or a combination of both. The CLAD certification covers three domains: Language structure and first and second language development; methodology of bilingual instruction, including instruction for English language development and specially designed instruction delivered in English (SDAIE); and culture and cultural diversity in the U.S. and California (Diaz-Rico, Weed, Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004). A bilingual CLAD or BCLAD is also offered in California (Blum-Martínez & Baker, 2012). This authorization requires a certain number of hours of student teaching in a non-English language classroom (e.g., Spanish, Mandarin, Korean, depending on the teacher education program's State certification), and evidence of language proficiency in the non-English language of instruction (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2011) along with the general requirements for the CLAD.

Neither of these ways of preparing teachers for teaching English learners adequately equips teachers with the theoretical and practice knowledge needed to meet the complex learning needs of emergent bilingual children and youth in classrooms where all instruction, materials, and other resources are in English (Arias & Faltis, 2012; Wentworth, Pellegrin, Thompson, & Hakuta, 2010). According to Olsen (2010), 59% of all secondary level English learners in California are considered to be *Long Term English Learners* – having been in English development courses from 6 or more years. Both are the result of educational policies and educational research that support a common knowledge theory of language development and popular views of how children, youth, and adults learn a second language, and thus, should learn English. As well-intentioned as SEI, CLAD and BCLAD education might be, it is unlikely that teachers prepared under these mandates have an understanding of language and language development that reflects contemporary understanding of language – L1, L1/L2, and the L2 (Valdés, 2005) - as a complex adaptive system which develops from participation in local interpersonal practices that involve language, both L1 and L2, in dynamic ways.

### **Contemporary Alternatives to The Common Knowledge Theory**

Contemporary scholars interested in language and language development reject the basic premises of the common knowledge theory of language development, and by implication, the educational assumptions about the role of explicit instruction of language forms for developing mastery of language. There has been what Block (2003) calls a “social turn” in second language acquisition theory that looks to other fields beyond the cognitive sciences for understanding language and language development. Rather than viewing language as an internal built-in syllabus that guides learners along a predictable path of development, contemporary scholars who have made the social turn posit that language is a complex dynamic system, which emerges from interpersonal and localized interactions (García & Kleifgen, 2010). In contemporary scholarship on language and language development, cognition is necessarily tied to social activity, and language emerges from, not prior to social interaction. Moreover, English learners in school are better understood as L2 users, whose language-using patterns emerge from and within a complex dynamic system, in which elements of L1, L1/L2 and L2 co-adapt over time (Cook, 2002; Valdés, 2005).

In contemporary socio-cognitive and sociocultural approaches to language theory, there is no such thing as a Universal Grammar (Chomsky, 1965) that organizes language into a code that must be attended to in order to become proficient in language (Tomasello, 2003). This is a “language myth” (Harris, 1981) that has become popularized in the general public, and especially so among the teacher force (Pennycook, 2010) as a central feature of the common knowledge theory of language development.

Drawing from alternative approaches (see Atkinson, 2011), contemporary scholars argue that language is

essentially a social construct that is non-linear, unpredictable and that emerges only through interactive practices that are local, repetitive, and focused on forms and functions according to community norms of usage. In this manner, language development (L1, L1/L2, and L2) is characterized by fits and starts, periods of stagnation and growth, and continuities and discontinuities, as the systems co-adapt, organize, and reorganize to reflect learners' group identity affinities and complex engagements with the environment (Pennycook, 2010; Larsen-Freeman, 2011).

Seen from this theoretical framework, grammatical structures in language emerge from interpersonal interactions across multiple localized settings in which children and youth use language socially and in academic contexts to explain, greet, hypothesize, joke, narrate, persuade, etc. (Larsen-Freeman, 2011; also see Lee, Mikesell, Joaquin, Mates, & Schumann, 2009). Ellis and Larsen-Freeman (2009) explain the process as follows: "As speakers communicate, they co-adapt their language use on a particular occasion. From such repeated encounters, stable language-using patterns emerge" (p.92) and continue to emerge as new counters transpire. L1, L1/L2 and L2 grammatical structures live and grow within the language-using patterns, and the language-using patterns change and co-adapt, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, and sometimes, even revert to earlier patterns. Emergent language also depends on other variables— the users age, investment, resources, patterns of interpersonal interaction, and prior L1 and L1/L2 language experiences, but not on pre-existing mental codes. Stability in emergent language is temporary as emergent bilingual users of English interact across local environments for different purposes, at times relying on their L1 as well as their L1/L2 language-using patterns, to interact with others who may or may not be L1/L2 users (Jørgensen, 2008). The development of L2 grammatical structures for language users involves a process of partial settling or *sedimentation* of language(s) used in frequently repeated and practiced social contexts (Hopper, 1998).

It is important to point out that from socio-cultural and socio-cognitive perspectives of language development, the emergent grammar in the language-using patterns of second language learners is necessarily flawed and imperfect (Valdés, Capitelli, & Alvarez, 2011). Second language structure and uses emerge from interpersonal interaction and participation in local social practices as L1/L2 users communicate in their developing, imperfect L2 to interact with others, interpret meanings, and show their knowledge. It is untenable from sociocultural approaches to language development to propose that perfection in language ability (L1 or L2 or L1/L2) is a pre-requisite or a target for participation (as the common knowledge theory does) -to get things done- in social practices (especially those localized in school contexts); all language users can and do participate with flawed language in all sorts of interactions involving various degrees of content and linguistic complexities. Some of these interactions are deemed essential for understanding specific content areas, and all result in complex grammatical structures and language patterns that work across localized content areas. There are certain members of a language community who may help learners to notice how their participation improves if they focus attention on certain things about content, but attention to learners' imperfect forms of language separate from the social context in which language is used is in and out itself ineffective for the reasons presented above.

### **Implications for Teacher Education and Teaching English Learners in K-12**

Contemporary scholarship on language (L1, L1/L2, and L2) as a complex system that emerges from local interaction has implications for teacher education and classroom teachers. Teacher education should orient teachers to viewing the teaching of English learners as the development of uses of language (L1, L1/L2, and L2) in the various content areas in school – art, language arts, literature, music, mathematics, social studies, and science— in ways that promote the emergence of language-using patterns through interpersonal, interpretive and presentational communicative events (Valdés, Capitelli, & Alvarez, 2011). In a promising 5 year study of Latino bilingual children learning English, Valdés, Capitelli, and Alvarez (2011) found that when young English learners interacted with adults (who did not explicitly teach language or correct errors) around stories, interpreted what they heard, and gave accounts of what they understood using art, written text, and other presentational means, their language blossomed. The children conversed about many topics using language for social interaction as well as for academic purposes. Their language-using patterns were imperfect as should be expected, and their language usage varied in complexity, as their emergent complex systems co-adapted to new localized language

and content learning experiences. In this study, there were no expectations of linear language development or perfect language use. The children interacted with adults about the meanings they interpreted from the stories.

In a study involving older emergent bilingual users, Bunch (2006) described how middle school students gained access to and participated in a rigorous curriculum by engaging in a range of social interactions around academic content areas. Bunch (2006) concluded: “This study suggests that, under the *right instructional conditions*, (my emphasis) students described as being fluent in “conversational English” yet lacking in “academic English” can participate successfully in challenging academic work in English” (p. 298). In other words, English learners can interact, interpret, and express understanding of academic content when teachers organize instruction around interactive, communicative-based classroom experiences.

What this new sociocultural and socio-cognitive research and theoretical perspectives are saying is that teachers and the teacher educators who prepare them need to learn how to plan challenging classroom experiences that develop content and language over time (Schleppegrell & O’Hallaron, 2011), with the understanding that language English learners use to communicate thoughts and ideas will be flawed, and that students rely on and use their L1, their L1/L2, and their developing L2 for a range of purposes within academic contexts. Children and youth with imperfect abilities in conversational English are capable of interacting with, interpreting, and performing in language across all of the content and language that lives in the local contexts of schools (Bunch, 2006), when teachers focus on what emergent bilingual students can do with both long-term and moment-to-moment support (Schleppegrell & O’Hallaron, 2011), including support for their L1, their L1/L2, as they develop their L2. It is counterproductive for teachers to be overly concerned with what students can’t express perfectly in the L2 (Reeves, 2006), because that is the inherent social nature of dynamic bilingualism (García, 2012), and polylingual development (Jørgensen, 2008; Pennycook, 2010). When teachers explicitly teach and expect students to learn language forms there is little opportunity for students to hear language being used to express ideas, to use their full communicative repertoire in support of translanguaging (García, Flores, & Chu, 2011; García, Flores, & Woodsley, 2012), or to engage in interpersonal interactions about meaning and the construction of ideas. Emergent bilingual students’ L1-, L1/L2- and L2-using patterns emerge and develop, but not in a linear fashion, or in predictable ways, when they are invited to participate in social interactions around academic content topics. Students who become bilingual in school need to interact with language (L1, L1/L2 and L2) over and over with the help of teachers who scaffold their learning within and across content areas (Walqui & Van Lier, 2010), so they can engage in the practices that involve L1-, L1/L2- and L2-using interaction patterns needed to learn fully in school contexts.

### **Changing Popular Views on Language Development and Bilingualism**

It will take much study on the part of teacher educators and teachers to recalibrate thinking about the principles and practices embodied in the common knowledge theory of language development. The ideas and new theoretical work presented in the final sections of this paper are the tip of the iceberg with respect to understanding the complex adaptive systems approach to language or the language as local practice theory in social-cultural literature on language and languages. The challenge is there, and my hope is that teacher educators and teachers alike realize that the common theory that guides much of what is happening in schools today is misguided, and must be replaced with more sociocultural understandings of language and language development.

Emergent bilingual children and youth will not learn the kinds of language and language functions needed to be successful in academic contexts by exclusively focusing on forms of English and expecting language (L2) to develop in a linear order from simple to complex, from less fluent to more fluent, or from less accurate to more accurate. To continue to teach language to English learners based on this view of language can only contribute to frustration among teachers and schools. Emergent bilingual students will, however, show progress if they engage with the teacher and classmates in well planned and well supported interactive, interpretative, and demonstrative communicative events that draw on their L1, L1/L2, and L2.

The evidence is mounting to suggest that among the chief reasons for the burgeoning number of long term English learners are that these students’ L1 and L1/L2 profiles are ignored, and instead they are provided with a narrow English only-curriculum, in which English is taught through explicit focus on forms, student errors



are constantly corrected, and communication with English speaking students is reduced. In addition, English learners in K-12 setting increasingly are provided with only partial access to the core content courses (Gifford & Valdés, 2006; Olsen, 2010), which contributes to the high numbers of long-term English learners – students who continue to perform poorly on English language exams after 5 or more years in ESL support classrooms. What all emergent bilingual students need is full access to the content with teachers who have a sociocultural understanding of language and language development among bilingual and polylingual language users. As de Jong & Harper (2011) point out, teacher education programs may help teachers accomplish this when they ask them to look *at* rather than *through* the language demands of the classroom in order to support language scaffolding for English language and literacy development (p. 87; emphasis in original).

As teacher educators and teachers learn more about contemporary theories of language (L1, L1/L2, and L2 use) and language development, to seriously question the validity of the common knowledge theory of language development, and to see language-using patterns, there is new hope that emergent bilingual users will be more equitably successful in the core content areas of art, language arts, literacy, mathematics, music, science, and social studies than is currently happening. Such a turn toward understanding language and language development of emergent bilingual users is particularly important with the inevitable advent of the Common Core standards, in which language practices permeate the standards in every content area (see Bunch, 2013). Not only will teachers and teacher educators need to re-orient their pedagogical knowledge toward the Common Core standards, but they will also need to re-think their understandings of bilingual language development to develop language pedagogical knowledge (Galguera, 2011). Pedagogical language knowledge is knowledge of language practices directly involved in teaching and learning academic disciplines that includes knowledge of how emergent bilinguals use language practices (translation, paraphrasing, code-switching, and imperfect language) to make sense of content area knowledge and activities. Now is an opportunity for teachers and teacher educators to reflect deeply about language, to renovate ideas about bilingualism (move from the idea of two separate languages) to more sociocultural understandings of dynamic bilingualism, and to pay more close attention to the language demands made across the academic content areas.

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