

Becoming bilingual is a way of life¹

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Abstract

Second language acquisition within the confines of a bilingual education program in the developing world is often haphazard or even counterproductive to language learning. A quick historical review of language acquisition theory and practice reveals that many current practices are out of sync with what is known about language learning. Using the Peruvian Quechua experience, principles and practices are applied to an actual bilingual program where second language acquisition was failing but has now improved significantly. The paper explores the competencies expected by teachers and provides a model, the Communicative Language Teaching Framework, for understanding the language learning process. Some best practices are explored by considering five core principles of the framework in light of the Quechua situation, which is in many ways typical of many developing nations' educational process. Finally a generic lesson plan is presented as a starting point for developing a realistic Communicative Competence program for minority language students.

Introduction

Becoming bilingual is a way of life. Your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the confines of your first language and into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling, and acting (Brown 1994 p. 1).

For many children of the developed world, becoming bilingual is an economic and social advantage. For the children of minority language groups within the national context, it is a requirement for survival. For these children, the question is not whether they should learn the national language, or in some cases a different language of wider communication, but when and how they will master the second language. The task of educators is to help these children become bilingual with as little trauma and ego/identity loss as is possible in the process.

The past thirty years of research has led to a solidifying of knowledge about language and language teaching and learning. The combined disciplines of linguistics, psychology, pedagogy, and human learning give teachers and learners a solid base on which to build an effective theory and methodology of second language acquisition. It is encouraging to note that though the various disciplines developed independently, they have taken a parallel path and reached similar conclusions. A quick review of history will help to place today's educational issues and theory discussions in perspective and allow us to move forward on the basis of what is now known about learning, language, teaching, and bilingualism.

It is important to remember that Second Language Acquisition (SLA) methods and approaches were based on what the developers of the methods and approaches understood and believed about language and learning at the time. As Brown (1994) argues:

You cannot teach effectively without understanding varied theoretical positions. This understanding forms a principled basis upon which you can choose the particular methods for teaching ...it is imperative first to sift through the many variables that come to bear on learning and teaching a second language (p. 15).

If theory is ever growing and maturing and if methods necessarily follow theory, the conclusion must be that no one method is going to permanently be the "ideal" method for every situation.

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Most methods are created to meet a specific need and to provide the "best" alternative at the time they are developed. However, as understanding and knowledge grows, methods must be shed or revised, renewed, and brought into line with the current knowledge base.

Historical development: Second language acquisition theory

SLA is a multidisciplinary field drawing primarily from linguistics and psychology and the sub-field of human learning/cognition. In order to understand the current thinking it is helpful to look at these disciplines since the turn of the century. While linguistics and psychology have developed at roughly the same pace, teaching methods run as much as twenty years behind the changes in the more theoretical fields.

Historically, the field of second language acquisition underwent a significant theory shift in the 1980s, and the theoretical base is now stable and growing. In countries (e.g., USA and Canada) where SLA theory is being advanced, practice appears to catch up more quickly than in some less developed countries which continue to base their teaching practices on the Generative/Cognitive model of the 1960s and, in some cases, on the Structural/Behaviourist/Audiolingual model of the 1940s. In Chart #1 I have listed the methods in the periods with which they are associated theoretically, although their practice continued many years into the next period.

Chart #1. Historical Development of SLA Theory

Period	Linguistics	Psychology	Theorists	Methods
1800s				Classical Method
1890-1919	*****	Classical Behaviorism	Pavlov	Direct Method
1920-1939	*****	Behaviorism	Watson	Grammar-Translation (Classical)
1940-1959	Structural (Descrip.)	Neo-behaviorist	B.F. Skinner Bloomfield/ Sapir	Audio-lingual
1960-1979	Generative (Transformational)	Cognitive (Meaningful Learning)	D. Ausubel J. Piaget C. Rogers N. Chomsky	TPR/ Silent Way/ Natural Appr./ Suggestopedia/ Learning Styles
1980-1990	Relational (Universals /Discourse)	Cognitive (Schemas/ Conversational context)	Greenberg Canale and Swain Krashen Cummins	Communicative Process
1990-present	Discourse Analysis	Cognitive Social context	Brown Spolsky McLaughlin	Communicative competence

The majority of research today focuses on the process by which majority language speakers learn another majority language, for example, Canadian English speakers learning French or American English speakers learning Japanese for business. A second focus is on minority speakers living in a majority language area and learning the majority language, such as Spanish speakers living in the USA and learning English. A third focus is on majority language speakers who are learning a minority language, for example, English speakers learning Welsh in Wales.

There is very little research available on bilingualism and second language acquisition among ethnic minority language groups in the developing world—research that is sorely needed to help improve current practices in these areas. In Peru, for example, the ethnic/linguistic minorities most in need of assistance in second language acquisition and bilingual education live isolated from the national language and culture. They have experienced centuries of neglect, if not outright oppression of their language and culture, and in the past century have been subjected to "submersion" education and cultural imperialism by the national language educational system.

Definitions and identity

Traditionally, bilingualism has been loosely defined as the ability to speak and understand two or more languages. Today's more complex world requires a more exact definition and analysis of the competencies needed by any given speech community when its members interact with speakers of another language.

According to Baker (1993:6) bilingualism is not simply the ability to speak two languages but also must include the components of written expression. Most recent research into bilingualism focuses on oracy and literacy—the four basic abilities of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Cummins (2000) develops the concept of a *cognitive competency*, the ability to reason and think, as a fifth ability factor in bilingualism. This notion was first introduced by Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) who referred to the ability to use both languages as thinking tools. Cummins took it farther and included the ability to reason and create new cognitive patterns or neural networks capable of handling the abstract uses of language that make up the deep structure of communication. Bilingualism and multilingualism must include the ability to continue growth in low frequency, abstract vocabulary and linguistically complex structures.

The five basic competencies are three-dimensional and reflect the inter-relation of various skill areas that make up the general competencies. These skills are generally agreed to be (Baker 1993):

- pronunciation (phonetic aptitudes),
- vocabulary (lexical development),
- grammar (syntax and rule development),
- meaning (comprehension and discourse features), and
- style (context, register, function).

An individual speaker may be more or less advanced in one competency without having an equal ability in the other competencies. For example a student may be quite proficient at reading English and understanding the words while lacking the ability to produce the same level of language in the pronunciation and style competencies. On the other hand, a speaker may be able to decode and pronounce words proficiently but have zero comprehension.

The three dimensional aspect comes from the spiral nature of the competencies. The depth of learning is constrained by the learner's cognitive ability, the learner's exposure to the written and the oral forms of the language in ways that stretch their knowledge, and the degree of linking and uniformity of gains in the competencies. Students who develop all five competencies at relatively equal rates will learn more because the networking between the abilities strengthens their overall learning. For example, improving vocabulary enables them to learn more syntax from a reading assignment while developing the discrete skills of grammar enhances the ability to control the registers and style. It is very much a network that is strengthened by having more cross-connections.

Socio-cultural issues and education policies compound the already complex process of defining bilingualism and determining who is bilingual. In many countries, definitions of bilingualism and decisions about the services offered to that population are very much politically controlled issues. For example in some countries, being *literate* is defined as the ability to sign one's name on official documents. Being *bilingual* is the ability to carry on a simple conversation with a census taker. So if you can carry on a conversation at the door and sign your name on the form, you don't need second language assistance or literacy classes and the government is thus relieved of responsibility for providing adequate educational opportunities to all its citizens. Yet, the person who can carry on a conversation and sign their name in two languages still needs both second language acquisition and literacy in order to proceed through the school system and/or to function in the employment sectors. Some countries do allow for first language literacy and schooling for 1-3 years but then expect students to function entirely in the second language for the remainder of their education. If we agree that bilingualism is the ability to read, write, speak, listen, and think

(continue learning and developing new cognitive patterns) in two languages, then we can see that most learners will not be able to gain all five competencies in both languages within in a shortened time frame, especially given the kinds of programs offered.

Proficiency models

Historically bilingualism was conceived as operating as a balance of scales (sometimes referred to as the Separate Underlying Proficiency model, Cummins, 1993,2001). According to models based on this perception, as proficiency in one language grows there is less mental and cognitive room for the other, and so it shrinks. These older theories presumed that developing the learner's mother tongue (minority language) prevented adequate development of the majority language.

Cummins (1989, 2000) provided a different explanation for bilingualism and cognitive development. Whether concepts, skills, processes, or strategies are learned in the first or second language, they feed a central processor in the brain, and either language can benefit from the cognitive advancement.² Cummins' Common Underlying Proficiency model (CUP) is explored by Baker (2000) and includes the following main points:

1. Irrespective of the person's first language, the thoughts that accompany talking, reading, writing and listening interact in the same "central engine" in the brain. When two or more languages are used, there is only one phonological processing source.
2. Bilingualism and multilingualism can be developed given the appropriate language contact situations, because the brain can easily store two or more languages.
3. Thought and verbal communication can develop through two languages as well as one. Cognitive functioning and school achievement also develop equally through one language or through two well-developed languages.
4. A child's language must be well developed to process the cognitive challenges of the classroom.
5. Speaking, listening, reading or writing in the first or the second language aids cognitive development. However, if a child operates continually in an insufficiently developed second language (e.g. in a "submersion classroom"), cognitive development is severely hindered.
6. When one or both languages are under-developed, cognitive function and academic achievement may be poor because of an unfavorable attitude toward learning through the second language or pressure to replace the home language with the majority language.

Though the CUP model does not explain everything that is known about bilingualism and cognitive functioning, it provides a straight-forward, well-documented explanation undergirding literacy teaching in both first and second languages for minority language children. This is particularly true where the minority language is of low status and where the minority language speakers are isolated from majority language exposure and cultural experience.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT):

This set of constructs about the nature of language, teaching/ learning, and construction of meaning has developed over the past decade into an approach or philosophy of language teaching. It is not a method in the traditional sense but provides a broadly based framework to inform practitioners who are making choices and choosing techniques. Brown (1994:244) provides a definition of CLT, summarized below:

1. Classroom goals focus on all the components of communication (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) and are not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence.

² See also: <http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/mother.htm>.

2. Language activities seek to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful communication. Curriculum content is a means instead of a goal.
3. Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary processes underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency rather than accuracy is stressed in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use.
4. In the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to *use* the language, productively in unrehearsed contexts.

If we accept the thesis that there is no one right way or method to teach or learn a second language, then we must have principles to guide the choice, implementation, evaluation, and growth of objectives, methods, techniques and activities. Teachers must understand how a learner learns and what motivates the learner in order to plan and execute activities that will result in competent communication.

Applying principles to the Quechua/Spanish learning situation in Peru

Brown (1994) suggests five core principles that apply well to the Quechua/Spanish learner in elementary classrooms in Peru:

1. Intrinsic motivation is a powerful incentive for learning.
2. A moderate to high level of risk-taking behavior is important.
3. Language and culture are inextricably intertwined.
4. Successful learners make a strategic investment in their own learning.
5. Self-confidence is an important precursor to success.

These five core principles must be refined and understood in light of the culture and worldview of both the students (as well as their parents) and the teachers. Much of the direction that the Ministry of Education of Peru is taking to modernize and improve the quality of education delivered in rural areas incorporates the spirit of Brown's principles. It is for this reason that many of the teachers resist the changes. It is a drastic about-face of nearly everything they learned from their own experience growing up in the system and from teacher's college. The difficulty facing the teachers is that their training in most cases has left them unprepared to look creatively for techniques and activities that build on these core principles in their classrooms. On the whole, teachers are trained to conformity and submission with no encouragement to be creative or to adapt their teaching to the students or the socio-cultural situation. However, as noted through analyzing the cultural values, learning styles, and worldview of the Quechua, there may be a degree of commonality between Brown's principles and the teachers' own worldviews which would enable teachers to take advantage of the principles in the classroom.

Brown's core principles, as they relate to the Conchucos Quechua classroom, set the stage for the basic premises of the new curriculum introduced by the government in its efforts to modernize and improve public education in Peru.

1. *Intrinsic Motivation.* The motivation of Quechua students in the early years of school is a complicated picture that includes meeting parental and teacher expectations, enjoyment and security in the classroom (affective issues), and societal demands in preparation for integration into the national culture. There are both instrumental (desire to learn for economic advancement) and integrative pressures on the students and the teachers, as well as the strong extrinsic pressure created by the school system itself.

Under the "Articulation" curriculum, the intrinsic motivation is given the weight it lacked previously. Students are encouraged to participate, communicate, and be actively involved in the learning and setting of learning goals. The pressure is now on the teacher to make learning "enjoyable and active." Students are no longer expected merely to sit and absorb content. The freedom of expression and interaction provides intrinsic motivation to be part of the group and to stay actively engaged in the lesson. The simple change to lessons that are appropriate to the student's age, interesting to them, and culturally relevant to their lives provides a great deal of motivation and connection to the learning process. Students begin to feel the power of expectations and start to set their own learning expectations. Once students understand that they can learn, they gain the will to learn.

2. Risk-taking behaviour. In traditional classrooms, risk-taking behaviour was strongly discouraged. No answer was better than a wrong answer. Conformity and correctness were the twin doctrines that dominated teaching and learning. Under the new approach, students and teachers are encouraged to begin taking risks, to explore and learn together. The perception of "teacher as god" and "student as ignorant" has been officially discarded, although there are many who continue to hold this view. The objectives and goals of the articulation encourage the student to make educated guesses, investigate, inquire, and explore. Students should be rewarded for asking questions, offering approximations, and for effort. It is difficult to change the habits and classroom behaviour of "older" students who have spent six to seven years completing only three grades. They already have conformity and uniformity ingrained into their learning. However, starting with kindergarten and first grade children who are involved in a participatory (interactive) classroom with an open teacher who seeks investigation, the children quickly adopt risk-taking behaviours and participate willingly and noisily. Risk-taking appears to be a trait that is acceptable in Quechua culture but one which was systematically destroyed by the traditional national education system.

3. Language and culture. The drastic difference seen in classrooms where bilingual communication is encouraged and classrooms where Spanish is dominant and the use of Quechua is at best ignored and at worst punished highlights the role of language and culture in both academic and personality development. Quechua students in traditional classrooms are typically shy, reserved, fearful, nervous, and unwilling to participate. They are passive recipients of the education being poured into their heads. They lack self-esteem, self-assurance and initiative.

On the other hand, students in the bilingual classrooms are noisy, clamoring to participate, proud of their learning, and willingly show-off for visitors. When the students recognize the respect for and use of their language and culture, their overall development leaps forward. As one teacher said, "It used to be that I couldn't get my students to say a word; now, I hardly can get a word in."

4. Strategic investments. Students must learn how to learn. A focus on rote memorization that does not enable the learners to develop their own meta-cognitive and linguistic strategies for language learning is not likely to lead to successful and sustained second language acquisition. Quechua learning preference on the whole leans to global but realistic approaches (author's personal classroom observation, Easthouse and Orr Easthouse 1994, Davis 1988). Nonsense drills, disconnected learning, rote memory without cultural context or comprehension and other forms of traditional school language drills tend to be ignored or at best tolerated but not seen as a "learning activity". For the students to be engaged in the learning activity, the techniques and methods used must be understood and accepted as a reasonable activity from within the cultural framework.

5. Self-confidence. A student with high global self-esteem and self-confidence will acquire a language more quickly and accurately than a student with low self-esteem because the affective factors are not overloading the student's sensory systems. "People derive their sense of self-esteem from the accumulation of experiences with themselves and with others and from the assessments of the external world around them" (Brown 1993:137). Students are unlikely to

develop a positive self-image when they do not understand the language used in the classroom, when they receive little or no positive feedback and/or face discrimination because of their linguistic and cultural background. It should not be surprising that students who are expected to fail and to repeat a grade two or three times because “they just can’t learn”, do tend to fail. Positive input experiences are required to gain the self-confidence required to learn. Their own frustration, coupled with the negative feedback from the school system, frequently produces students who are depressed and convinced that they are stupid and unable to progress academically.

In articulation classrooms where there is an emphasis on building skills, positive feedback, and success in small steps, students gain an awareness of their personal worth quickly and build the self-esteem needed to cushion mistakes made in learning. The open, active, participating student is not crushed or ashamed if he/she makes an error in the classroom. The group seeks to come up with the right answers together and the teacher provides a model for evaluating responses. Where students are learning and gaining confidence in their ability to learn through the home language, they are much more willing to experiment with and participate in communicating in the second language which they are learning.

Eclectic Methodology

Factors in lesson development.

1. The focus must be on classroom communication: student-to-student and student-to-teacher.
2. The lesson plans must be based on actual authentic community and classroom experiences.
3. The lesson plans must not teach "new information" but rather give words and expression in Spanish to what has been learned in Quechua.
4. The teacher must allow for inter-language development and recognize the sequential development of ability rather than demanding correctly formed responses and communication.

Generic lesson plan for Spanish as a second language

Each week is planned around a cultural theme introducing Spanish Peruvian cultural concepts or actions that are not familiar to minority language students as well as significant events and objects in the Quechua culture. The weekly lesson plan includes core vocabulary and structures as well as enrichment levels. Each teacher can choose the level appropriate to the ability of the students. Different students in the same classroom may be expected to master different levels according to ability, though all should make progress towards minimum core communication objectives listed with each lesson outline.

The weekly lesson plan provides the framework around which the teacher must develop classroom activities and discussion to utilize the vocabulary and grammatical structures being learned.

The lesson components for Spanish as a second language are the same every week although the teacher varies the time delegated to each item and the way it is presented during the week. The daily lesson is 40 minutes divided between the following activities:

1. **Song:** A short song with content related to the theme is supplied but if the teacher knows another song that is suitable to the theme, they can use that instead. The songs provide pronunciation practice as well as internalization of grammatical patterns and vocabulary.

2. **Total Physical Response** exercise (TPR): Both formal (3rd person plural) and informal (2nd personal singular) commands are used since Quechua does not differentiate between the two and the students must learn both forms and the context in which each is appropriate. This is the only section in which the content can not be varied (since teachers themselves tend to use them incorrectly.)
3. **Vocabulary:** An illustrated poster providing a context for the words is provided and the teachers are encouraged to personalize the vocabulary for the students, using actual names, families, objects, etc.
4. **Substitution model:** Provides a grammatical model of the most common question and sentence forms in which the vocabulary words can be practiced.
5. **Dialogue:** This is a suggested interchange which the teacher can use to stimulate conversation in the classroom. Students can take both sides of the conversation.

Change in the valley

Students who graduate from a high school in Conchucos in the 90s are more likely to be relatively "balanced bilinguals" although Quechua is still their dominant language. The Spanish they speak is considered "mountain Spanish" or "country hick" by educated coastal city speakers. These speakers lack the facility of correct phonetics, use of tenses, grammatical complexity and vocabulary to be considered "educated". Their literacy skills in Spanish are poor and they have low levels of reading comprehension in Spanish due to the lack of vocabulary and poor cognitive development of higher level reasoning and analysis skills in Spanish with no formal development of the home language. The tools and methodologies needed to change this profile are now available. The next decade can produce coordinated bilinguals able to compete academically and socially with their Spanish-only peers.

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