

The Multilingual Turn

Implications for SLA, TESOL and
Bilingual Education

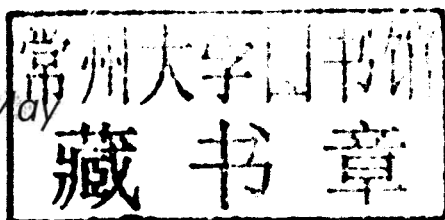
Stephen May



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and Bilingual Education

Edited by Stephen May



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THE MULTILINGUAL TURN

“This important contribution to educational linguistics . . . adds a much-needed social perspective to the theory of SLA, English language teaching, and bilingual education. It takes a useful and needed step in moving beyond the monolingual and psycholinguistic biases of researchers in SLA and TESOL.”

Bernard Spolsky, Bar-Ilan University, Israel

“Boundary-breaking, with wonderful width as well as originality, this book is at the cutting edge. The star-studded list of chapter authors are THE experts in their fields of study.”

Colin Baker, Bangor University, UK

“The critical approach to SLA, TESOL, bi- and multilingual education raises much needed questions about the usefulness of subject-bounded approaches to second language teaching. The case for multidisciplinary frameworks is well-made.”

Naz Rassool, The University of Reading, UK

Drawing on the latest developments in bilingual and multilingual research, *The Multilingual Turn* offers a critique of, and alternative to, still-dominant monolingual theories, pedagogies, and practices in SLA, TESOL, and bilingual education. Critics of the “monolingual bias” argue that notions such as the idealized native speaker, and related concepts of interlanguage, language competence, and fossilization, have framed these fields inextricably in relation to monolingual speaker norms. In contrast, these critics advocate an approach that emphasizes the multiple competencies of bi/multilingual learners as the basis for successful language teaching and learning.

This volume takes a big step forward in resituating the issue of multilingualism more centrally in applied linguistics and, in so doing, making more permeable its

key subdisciplinary boundaries—particularly, those between SLA, TESOL, and bilingual education. It addresses this issue head on, bringing together key international scholars in SLA, TESOL, and bilingual education to explore from cutting-edge interdisciplinary perspectives what a more critical multilingual perspective might mean for theory, pedagogy, and practice in each of these fields.

Stephen May is Professor of Education in Te Puna Wānanga and Deputy Dean Research in the Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland, New Zealand. He is editor of the interdisciplinary journal *Ethnicities* and Associate Editor of the journal *Language Policy*.

**In memory of David Corson (1945–2001), one of the
pioneering boundary crossers in our field**

PREFACE

This volume began (as most things do) with a conversation. After Lourdes Ortega had given a keynote address, “The Bilingual Turn in SLA,” at the Annual AAAL Conference in Atlanta in 2010, I contacted her to discuss synergies with my own work on the disciplinary constraints of SLA, TESOL, and bilingual education. This initial conversation expanded to include others and led, in turn, to my chairing a colloquium at AAAL in Boston in 2012 that involved many of the contributors herein.

But there is a far earlier antecedent that I also would like to acknowledge. David Corson, to whom this volume is dedicated, was a key, and still relatively rare, exemplar of an applied linguistics scholar committed both to theoretical revisionism and a determined interdisciplinarity. Along with Jim Cummins, his work in the 1980s and 1990s specifically bridged the TESOL and bilingual education fields and unpacked the related first and second language (L1/L2) divide, all with an underpinning commitment to social justice. His untimely death robbed applied linguistics of his keen intellectual insights and, in an academic context increasingly preoccupied with recency, so too the prescience and importance of his work has since been largely lost to sight. On a personal note, David was my postgraduate advisor in the 1980s and was a central figure in mentoring my early academic career. Indeed, my own academic interests, commitments, and interdisciplinarity have been very much shaped by his example. For that, I hope this current volume constitutes something of a debt repaid.

Meanwhile, in getting us to this point, some other thanks are also due. To my friends and colleagues represented herein for their willingness to contribute to this project in the first instance and, more importantly, for actually making it happen (the two aren’t always the same, especially with edited volumes). To Claire Kramsch and Colin Baker for their lucid, constructive, and critical review

commentaries on early versions of each chapter in the volume. And finally, to my redoubtable editor, Naomi Silverman, for keeping me to task throughout, despite my often-heroic efforts at procrastination and/or circumlocution, traits for which I am widely and justly renowned.

Stephen May
Faculty of Education,
University of Auckland, New Zealand
January 2013

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INTRODUCING THE “MULTILINGUAL TURN”

Stephen May

Multilingualism, it seems, is the topic du jour—at least in critical applied linguistics. Driven by globalization, and what Vertovec (2007) has described as “superdiversity,” critical applied linguists have increasingly turned their attention to the dynamic, hybrid, and transnational linguistic repertoires of multilingual (often migrant) speakers in rapidly diversifying urban conurbations worldwide. Such repertoires have been described by Makoni and Pennycook (2012) as “lingua franca multilingualism,” where “languages are so deeply intertwined and fused into each other that the level of fluidity renders it difficult to determine any boundaries that may indicate that there are different languages involved” (Makoni & Pennycook, 2012, p. 447). Other comparable terms include Rampton’s (2011) “contemporary urban vernaculars,” Canagarajah’s (2011) “codemeshing,” Creese et al.’s (2011) “flexible bilingualism,” Pennycook’s (2010) “metrolingualism,” García’s (2009) “translanguaging,” and Jørgensen’s (2008) “polylingual languaging,” to name but a few.

The terminological proliferation notwithstanding, the increasing focus on superdiverse linguistic contexts is welcome. It has usefully foregrounded multilingualism, rather than monolingualism, as the new norm of applied linguistic and sociolinguistic analysis. It has increasingly challenged bounded, unitary, and reified conceptions of languages and related notions of “native speaker” and “mother tongue,” arguing instead for the more complex fluid understandings of “voice” (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007, 2012), “language as social practice” (Heller, 2007), and a related “sociolinguistics of mobile resources” (Blommaert, 2010). And, following from both, it has highlighted the need for more nuanced ethnographic understandings of the complex multilingual repertoires of speakers in urban environments, along with their locatedness, scale (Blommaert, 2010), flow, and circulation (Heller, 2011) in a globalized world. As Makoni and Pennycook (2012)

summarize it in their recent discussion of the notion of “metrolingualism,” the aim of this new, critical, urban applied linguistics is to describe “the ways in which people of different and mixed backgrounds use, play with and negotiate identities through language” (Makoni & Pennycook, 2012, p. 449).

But there are also a number of ironies in this sudden “turn” towards multilingualism. The first, of course, is that urban multilingualism is not solely the product of late modernity but has been present in earlier periods of history, particularly prior to the advent of nationalism and the nation-state (Canagarajah & Liyanage, 2012; May, 2012). Likewise, Western applied linguistics’ recent “discovery” of multilingualism reveals its own lack of historicity and not a little ethnocentrism. After all, scholars from beyond the West have long argued for just such an examination of multilingualism, albeit more broadly than in just urban contexts, and a related contesting of the monolingual norms that still underpin the study of language acquisition and use (the distinction itself reflecting this). Indeed, as I discuss in Chapter 1, Yamuna Kachru and Shikaripur Sridhar mounted just such a critique nearly 20 years ago, albeit with little effect on the wider field at that time.

And this brings us to the next irony: Despite an increasing interest in, and engagement with, multilingualism, “mainstream” applied linguistics remains to this day largely untouched, uninterested, and unperturbed by such developments. We see this most clearly in second language acquisition (SLA), but also in much of the TESOL industry, both of which continue to treat the acquisition of an additional language (most often, English) as an ideally hermetic process uncontaminated by knowledge and use of one’s other languages. A final related irony is that those working within mainstream SLA and TESOL can continue to blithely ignore this turn towards multilingualism precisely because it remains corralled within a “critical applied linguistics” with which they seldom engage (or, when they do, take seriously).

This volume is an initial attempt to resituate the issue of multilingualism more centrally in applied linguistics and, in so doing, to make more permeable some of its key subdisciplinary boundaries—particularly, those between SLA, TESOL, and bilingual education. The chapters can be said to focus, respectively, on SLA (May; Ortega; Block), TESOL (Canagarajah; Norton; Leung), and bilingual education (García & Flores; Li Wei; Blackledge, Creese, & Takhi). That said, this demarcation is itself inevitably somewhat arbitrary—no more, in effect, than a useful heuristic—since all chapters traverse a range of issues and transgress a number of boundaries. Throughout, we have problematized the normative ascendancy of monolingualism underpinning the study of language acquisition and use and related educational and assessment practices. However, such is the ongoing hegemony of monolingualism in these fields; try as we might, we have not wholly escaped from the established terminology associated with it—most notably, the still ubiquitous terms of “native speaker” and, of course, “language” itself. The volume is also still focused predominantly on Western contexts, an ongoing legacy of the hegemony of Western applied linguistics. However, we hope that the volume

at least provides the basis for further academic discussion of multilingualism across a much wider range of contexts in the coming years (see also Conteh & Meier, *in press*).

In Chapter 1, I examine why, despite the long-standing critique of the “monolingual bias” in SLA and TESOL, so little progress has been made in developing, as a first step, a more additive approach to bi/multilingualism. By drawing on Bourdieu’s notion of field and Bernstein’s concepts of classification and framing, I argue that the construction of SLA and TESOL as academic disciplines and the dominance of linguistic–cognitive approaches within them actively delimits the possibilities of developing a more additive bilingual approach, although it does not foreclose it. By way of example, I conclude by discussing LEAP (Language Enhancing the Achievement of Pasifika), a major web-based professional development resource for teachers, which integrates research in bilingualism and bilingual education with second language teaching and learning. LEAP thus provides a still rare international exemplar that takes seriously the challenge of developing an additive bilingual pedagogy for SLA and TESOL. It could also potentially be developed further to incorporate the latest theoretical developments underpinning a more dynamic fluid understanding of bi/multilingualism since additive bilingualism can be criticized in turn for reinforcing, rather than undermining, the discreteness of linguistic boundaries.

In Chapter 2, Lourdes Ortega argues that both nativeness and monolingualism should be abandoned as organizing principles in the study of additional language learning, particularly within her own community of linguistic–cognitive SLA scholars. She first examines the ideological roots of the monolingual bias in linguistic–cognitive SLA work and highlights the serious validity and ethical problems that ensue when late bilingualism is investigated as the psycholinguistic process of developing monolingual competence a second time around in life. Ortega argues instead for a strategic theoretical commitment to usage-based linguistics (UBL) as a means of resituating the SLA field. For Ortega, UBL can help SLA researchers in three important ways by encouraging: a shift of the explanatory burden from birth to history and experience; a focus on the link between language input affordances and learning success; and an analytical treatment of linguistic development as self-referenced, nonteleological, and unfinished. An acknowledgement of its inherent monolingualism, coupled with a strategic commitment to UBL, is crucial for an epistemic reorientation of linguistic–cognitive SLA, away from explaining why bilinguals are not native speakers (i.e., monolinguals) and towards understanding the psycholinguistic mechanisms and consequences of becoming bi/multilingual later in life.

David Block, in Chapter 3, develops and extends his earlier sociocultural critique of the monolingual bias inherent in linguistic–cognitive SLA to include an additional call to address directly the issues of embodiment and multimodality. He first examines, drawing on Bourdieu and Merleau-Ponty, how embodiment is inextricably linked to language acquisition and use, providing a range of culturally

specific examples. Drawing on Gee, Hymes, and Goffman, among others, he then argues that multimodality—including, but not limited to, proxemics, posture, and gesture—must be addressed more seriously by linguistic-cognitive SLA scholars, again, providing a range of illustrative examples from different cultural contexts. In combination, he thus advocates for both a multilingual and multimodal turn to SLA.

In Chapter 4, Suresh Canagarajah argues for a practice-based view of language and competence as the best means of examining the linguistics of contact (where speakers of different languages come into contact with each other and attempt to negotiate communication in such contexts successfully) and the related uses of language varieties in such contexts as complex, fluid, and mobile semiotic resources. By way of example, Canagarajah examines what he describes as the “translingual practice” of adult African skilled migrants in the United States, Britain, Australia, and South Africa in their interactions with and uses of English. He explores how these multilingual migrants develop a more complex language awareness and metalinguistic competence through practice—a “performative competence” that does not treat languages as separate but rather takes their multilingual repertoire as a starting point. What is emphasized is thus the repertoire—the way the different language resources constitute an integrated ever-expanding competence in such contact zones—combining effective language use and learning in the process.

Bonny Norton, in Chapter 5, examines four multilingual contexts where participants are negotiating the often-complex connections between literacy, identity, and language teaching. These include students’ resistant reading of texts in South Africa, the appeal of *Archie* comics among multilingual young people in Canada, the perceptions of literacy among Pakistani students and the influence of English on their learner identities, and the use of digital literacy among multilingual students in Uganda. Drawing on the notion of “investment,” she explores the socially and historically constructed relationship of the learners in each of these contexts to the target language (English) and how their complex multilingual identities inform and mediate their language learning. Each of the contexts she examines suggests that meaning making is facilitated when learners are in a position of relative power within a given literacy event and when learners’ social, cultural, and linguistic identities are validated in the teaching and learning process.

In Chapter 6, Constant Leung presents a reflexive examination of the notion of communicative competence in English Language Teaching (ELT). In particular, he explores the continuing ambiguities between certified communicative competence—via proficiency test scores, for example—and the observed capacity of English language learners to communicate in context. He examines critically the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, a number of internationally marketed textbooks, and English (as a subject) in the National Curriculum of England, all of which are ostensibly predicated on the notion of communicative competence. He then draws on spoken interaction within linguistically diverse classrooms in London in order to explore the match (and mismatch)

between these conventional understandings of communicative competence and multilingual classroom learning. In so doing, he highlights the importance of adding the notion of students’ “participatory involvement” to language knowledge so as to better reflect the complexities of communicative competence in multilingual learning contexts.

Ofelia García and Nelson Flores, in Chapter 7, focus on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) now adopted by nearly all U.S. states. The CCSS present an integrated model of learning where language/literacy and content overlap significantly. CCSS also emphasizes languaging as action and practice, rather than language as a system, with a related emphasis on participatory involvement leading to understanding and more complex language use. As such, they argue, the CCSS could actively accommodate and draw on the rapidly increasing linguistic diversity in U.S. classrooms, and the associated complex “translanguaging” practices of bi/multilingual students, in the teaching and learning process, although it currently does not do so. García and Flores outline what an alternative “Bilingual Common Core State Standards” (BCCSS) might comprise. First, a BCCSS would provide different progressions of what bilingual students are able to do using English, and in their languages other than English, in order to meet standards. Second, it would legitimate translanguaging pedagogical strategies as a scaffold for learning English, and, finally, it would need to be aligned with assessments that separate language proficiency from content knowledge.

In Chapter 8, Li Wei examines Chinese-language “complementary schools” in Britain, which teach bi/multilingual students on a voluntary basis and within local community contexts outside of normal school hours. The chapter is underpinned by data on classroom interactions in six schools (three Mandarin and three Cantonese language schools) located in three British cities. Li Wei focuses, in particular, on the co-learning of both language and cultural practices that occurs between the teachers and students in these classrooms. Co-learning, he argues, challenges the usual unequal power relationships between teachers and students by fostering a more dynamic and participatory engagement in knowledge construction in the classroom. Co-learning also allows both teachers and students to draw on their multilingual resources and related funds of knowledge in the teaching and learning process.

In Chapter 9, Adrian Blackledge, Angela Creese, and Jaspreet Kaur Takhi employ Bakhtin’s notion of “heteroglossia” to argue for an understanding of multilingualism that dispenses with any vestigial attachment to discrete language boundaries. Drawing on Bakhtin’s related notions of indexicality, tension-filled interaction, and multivoicedness, they examine data from one classroom lesson in a Panjabi complementary school in Birmingham, England. In so doing, they highlight the fluidity of multilingual language practices therein, along with the significance of language play—including stylization, parody, and pastiche—and student identities in the teaching and learning context. They conclude by arguing for the importance of an understanding of multilingualism that balances

imperatives towards standardization, centralization, and correctness alongside the acceptance of linguistic signs and voices, which index students' localities, social histories, circumstances, and complex, dynamic, bi/multilingual identities.

The volume ends with a brief afterword on where all this might (or should) take us next.

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1

DISCIPLINARY DIVIDES, KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION, AND THE MULTILINGUAL TURN

Stephen May

The subject is initially established by the silence through which power speaks. (Bernstein, 1990, p. 28)

Writing in the early 1990s on the “monolingual bias” inherent in second language acquisition (SLA) research, Yamuna Kachru (1994) despondently observed that, up until that point, “few attempts [had] been made to gather evidence [of second language acquisition] from stable contexts of bi-/multilingualism in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America” (Kachru, 1994, p. 796). Rather, she argued, the Chomskyan notion of the idealized native speaker, and related concepts of inter-language, language competence, and fossilization, has framed the SLA research field inextricably in relation to monolingual speaker norms.

In making this critique, there is no allied requirement to assume that these monolingual norms are unidimensional or that monolingual speakers do not themselves demonstrate a range of linguistic competencies in relation to them (cf. Ellis, 2008; Rothman, 2008; see also Rampton 1990). Indeed, this is precisely the point that Kachru (1994) is making: Monolingual bias occurs because the notion of monolingual norms as an invariant standard presupposes monolingualism to be the unmarked, unexamined category and “native speaker” competence to be a uniform benchmark in relation to second language learning. In so doing, the existing bi/multilingual repertoires of learners were, in her view, either ignored or perceived in explicitly deficit terms. So too, by extension, were the fluid and overlapping language uses, and related linguistic and sociocultural competencies, of multilingual communities.

Commenting on fossilization as the dominant explanation in SLA for learner “errors,” Kachru (1994) notes, for example, that “[w]hatever the psycholinguistic validity of the notion, it is irrelevant to situations in which a second or an