Bilingualism and Second Language Acquisition

Andrew Lynch

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Abstract

Language researchers have traditionally drawn distinctions between phenomena of “bilingualism” and the processes and features of “second language acquisition” (SLA). Accounts have generally relied upon factors of context, age of acquisition, degree of proficiency or ability, “nativeness,” or “native-likeness,” and social identity. In this chapter, I provide a cursory explanation of the potential relationship between bilingualism and SLA, pointing to the common ground between these two areas of inquiry.

Keywords

Bilingualism • Language contact • Second language acquisition • Context • Proficiency

A. Lynch (*)
Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL, USA
e-mail: a.lynch@miami.edu

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Introduction

The criteria that may be used to classify someone as a “bilingual” or as a “second language” (L2) speaker are quite diverse, and it is difficult to distinguish between the two on objective, empirical grounds alone. Much like the general population, language researchers tend to draw a distinction based upon some combination of the following considerations:

- **Context of acquisition**: Did the individual acquire both languages in naturalistic settings (i.e., at home) or in institutional settings (i.e., in the classroom)?
- **Age of acquisition**: Did she acquire both languages during early childhood or was one of the two acquired later, i.e., during adolescence or adulthood?
- **Degree of proficiency**: Does she demonstrate basic or low-level abilities within limited topic ranges or does she produce complex and sophisticated discourse on a wide range of topics?
- **Identity and “native” or “native-like” qualities**: Does she self-identify as a “speaker” of both languages, laying some sort of personal claim to their use, and do other “in-group” speakers of both languages also consider her as such? Does she “sound” or behave like an imagined native speaker, or does she give the impression of someone who is “foreign” or “nonnative-like” (in terms of pronunciation, grammar, lexical usage, pragmatic patterns, and stylistic and discursive repertoires)?

I take up these questions in this chapter, emphasizing the factors that make responses to them a rather complicated matter. As we will see, complications arise because a great number of variables enter into answering each of these questions, and in some cases, there are few conventionally objective criteria involved, particularly in the case of the latter two questions, e.g., “she can talk about anything with no problem” or “she sounds native in both languages.” Probably for these reasons, researchers have focused mostly on the first two questions, which involve more easily definable criteria for empirical observation and analysis, and also on the third question – though to lesser extent – since phonological, grammatical, and lexical aspects of proficiency can be assessed with relative ease (but not without some caveats). Answers to the fourth question lie much more on perceptual and social-psychological grounds, usually involving subjective sorts of criteria and more qualitative methodologies.

Early Developments

The reluctance to draw any parallels between “bilinguals” and “second language” (L2) speakers has its roots in the paradigm of Western modernity. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, language was an essential feature of nationhood, and “one language-one nation” ideology prevailed. Saussurean structuralist thought in linguistics, which would emerge as an autonomous scientific discipline during the early twentieth century, reflected this ideology in the sense that it conceptualized
geopolitically delimited languages as bounded and sovereign systems residing fundamentally in the minds of speakers who belong to an idealized, homogeneous speech community. This ideology or philosophy of language sensu stricto implied that people who spoke two or three languages would have to maintain them mentally separate from each other; if they did not, they could become linguistically and psychologically confused and hence be uncertain and untrustworthy with regard to their national allegiance. This ideology was readily apparent during the period of the two World Wars, when nationalism literally became a cause to die for. In the USA, for example, laws against speaking non-English languages in public (aimed at German speakers) were enacted in Iowa and Nebraska in the wake of WWI, and as late as the 1960s, Chicano schoolchildren were physically punished for speaking Spanish on school premises in the Southwest, even in Los Angeles. In Spain, during the early years of the Franco regime (1939–1975), people were imprisoned for speaking Catalán.

The different ways in which the fields of “bilingualism” and “second language acquisition” (SLA) were articulated in terms of theory and research also explain in part why they have generally remained rather separate from each other. Uriel Weinreich’s landmark book *Languages in Contact* (1953) provided much of the basis and subsequent stimulus for contemporary inquiry into bilingualism from a sociolinguistic perspective (also commonly referred to as “language contact”), and, from a psycholinguistic perspective, behavioral psychology prepared the ground for the development of a continuing research paradigm of bilingual language and cognition. While the sociolinguistic study of language contact took “naturally produced” language – preferably in situ – as the object of analysis, studies of cognition (i.e., psycholinguistics) were controlled and experimental, usually taking place in laboratory or institutional settings. It is important to note that the field of SLA emerged during the late 1960s and 1970s more within the framework of the latter. These differences of methodological paradigm were the source of contentious debates among linguists throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Weinreich’s work focused principally on the longstanding multilingual situation of Switzerland, where French, German, Romansch, and Italian are all spoken within the same national boundaries. The argumentation and analysis presented in *Languages in Contact* was focused on phenomena of societal multilingualism and language use in situ, not on the situation of languages that were acquired and used mostly in institutional settings. Weinreich drew a distinction between bilinguals who possessed a singular semantic system encompassing two languages (“compound bilingualism”); those who possessed two different semantic systems, each one corresponding to a respective language (“coordinate bilingualism”); and those who depended on the interpretation of words in a weaker language (L2) through concepts of a more dominant language (“sub-coordinate bilingualism”). He based this distinction roughly on the context of acquisition and use; if the two languages had been learned and used within a same context, “compound bilingualism” was more likely the outcome.

Haugen (1953) highlighted the relativity of the criteria involved. He argued that anyone capable of producing meaningful utterances in more than one language could
be considered bilingual. Mackey (1968) also emphasized that distinctions between bilingualism and L2 use were arbitrary, since it is impossible to identify a particular point in life at which the L2 learner qua L2 speaker becomes “bilingual” for classificatory purposes of linguistic research. Context and age were undoubtedly the broadly defined criteria that served to make the distinction as SLA – concerned almost exclusively with adult L2 learners in classroom settings – emerged as an autonomous field of inquiry. One of the first important theoretical arguments for the nascent discipline was made by Larry Selinker in 1972, in an article titled “Interlanguage.” Selinker reasoned that L2 learners are involved in an attempt to approximate a “native language” target. He termed the approximant variety that they acquire and use interlanguage, a system somewhere between their native language and the target language. The characteristics of this learner variety became the topic of substantial research and lively debate during the 1970s, with many arguments continuing from the 1950s and 1960s, e.g., that “transfer” of structures from the learner’s first language is the most prevalent feature of IL, that learner errors are systematic and largely developmental, and that the strategies underlying L2 learning are substantially the same ones involved in L1 acquisition (Corder 1967). Some scholars at the time emphasized the lack of uncontroversial criteria for defining a “native language” – or for that matter any language – from a linguistic or institutional perspective, e.g., Roeming (1966) who affirmed that: “No one can define language in such terms that one can ever objectively set standards of proficiency…. In second language learning standards of proficiency have been devised which are not relevant even to one’s native language or to one’s ability to transfer meaning” (p. 10). Valdés and Figueroa (1994) would restate this same concern nearly three decades later in their argument regarding institutional bias in the testing of bilingual language abilities: “it is doubtful that one could construct an instrument or even a set of procedures that would meaningfully assess the differences in articulateness among two adult native speakers” (p. 67).

**Major Contributions**

In language contact situations and in language learning environments the world over, four common linguistic phenomena have been amply studied: (1) simplification, (2) overgeneralization, (3) transfer, and (4) code switching or language mixing. The latter has been the subject of extensive discussion and analysis, which I will not take up here (see Bullock and Toribio 2009). Simplification affects oppositions in the grammatical system to forge a “simpler” system, e.g., noun gender and number, morphological agreement, and distinctions in verb tense, aspect, and mood. Forms that occur with greater frequency (e.g., the lexeme to have rather than to possess) or that bear surface similarities to particular forms in the dominant or primary language may be overgeneralized at the expense of lower-frequency or less “parallel” forms in the secondary language (the less-dominant language of the bilingual or the target language being learned by L2 students), e.g., overextension of the usage of indicative forms in contexts that normatively require subjunctive in the discourse of both
heritage language (HL) and L2 Spanish speakers in the USA. Linguistic markedness may also be relevant, as particular forms that are perceived as less salient or as having more general functions take the place of others perceived as more context specific or linguistically constrained.

A good example of the effects of markedness in processes of L2 learning and bilingual usage is found in Mougeon et al. (2010) analysis of the acquisition of stylistic variants among French-language immersion learners in Ontario, Canada. These authors distinguished between five different types of variants along a socio-stylistic continuum in the local variety of French spoken in eastern Ontario: (1) “marked informal variants,” which are most typical of the informal speech of males of lower social strata and are stigmatized in formal registers (e.g., pronunciation of object pronouns toi and moi as [twe] and [mwe] rather than the normative [twa] and [mwa]); (2) “mildly marked informal variants,” which are characteristic of informal speech but may occur in formal registers (e.g., absence of the particle ne in negative sentences); (3) “neutral variants,” which can serve as a default stand-in for more marked variants (e.g., usage of auto to refer to a car rather than the markedly informal char or the markedly formal voiture); (4) “formal variants,” which are typical of formal registers or careful speech, especially among women of upper social strata (e.g., use of the verb demeurer [to reside] rather than the more informal rester); and (5) hyper-formal variants, which are low-frequency forms used almost exclusively in formal registers and by speakers of upper social strata (e.g., use of the construction ne...que rather than juste to express restriction) (pp. 9–10). Mougeon et al. found that all of the L2 students used marked formal variants much more than local bilingual speakers, as a result of the formal register input they had been receiving in course text materials and in teacher discourse. Those students who had greater exposure to local French L1 speakers beyond the school setting used mildly marked informal variants more than the other students, establishing greater similarity of their repertoires with those of local bilinguals, although more highly marked variants were absent from the immersion learners’ speech (cf. Rampton 1995, 2013). The authors noted, in comparison, that the use of the marked informal variant so, likely the result of transfer from English, was highest among socially restricted French-English bilinguals (i.e., those Francophone-background speakers who were exposed to and used English much more than French), whose speech would potentially serve to amplify its use among L2 immersion learners (pp. 152–153).

Mougeon et al.’s findings reflect a general principle of HL acquisition and use with regard to the context of acquisition and modality and type of input, i.e., the HL is acquired principally in home and community environments, so HL oral repertoires are characterized by greater use of informal variants; L2 learners, on the other hand, often evidence more standard usage, explicitly acquired in classroom contexts where an emphasis is placed on written modes of expression. In the language produced by both non-dominant bilinguals and L2 users, instantiations of transfer of particular forms, functions, or patterns from the more dominant language or L1 are usually evident. As Silva-Corvalán (1994) cogently demonstrated, transfer may be “indirect,” as through the preference demonstrated for more surface-similar or parallel
variants in the dominant language or L1, or it may be “direct,” as in the case of lexical or syntactic calques and borrowings. As Klee and Lynch (2009) point out, it is noteworthy that all of the types of *lexical-syntactic calques* identified by Silva-Corvalán (1994) in the bilingual speech of Mexican-Americans are also quite common among English-speaking L2 learners of Spanish, e.g., *tener un buen tiempo* [“to have a good time” – divertirse]; ¿Cómo te gustó la película? [“How did you like the movie?” – ¿Te gustó la película?]; *Mi padre es seis pies* [“My father is six feet” – Mi padre mide seis pies]; *llegar en tiempo* [“to arrive on time” – llegar a tiempo]; *la más importante persona* [“the most important person” – la persona más importante]. Klee and Lynch concluded that the use of the same sorts of calques across both groups is more likely the result of language transfer, owed to interlinguistic factors, and less probably the result of a culturally based bilingual modeling process, as some others have argued (p. 236).

Lynch (2008) provided further evidence of similarities in the lexical and grammatical repertoires of English-dominant HL and L2 speakers of Spanish in the USA (see Montrul 2012 for a general overview of similarities and differences between HL and L2 speakers). As in the research conducted by Sankoff and her colleagues (1997) with advanced L2 users of French in Montreal, Lynch (2008) demonstrated that, among L2 speakers of Spanish in Miami, the usage of more “native-like” grammatical forms and particular socio-stylistic variants (e.g., discourse markers) is correlated with the degree of social exposure and regular use of the language in the local bilingual environment. In both Montreal and Miami, accuracy of gender agreement appeared to be correlated with frequency of local discourse markers, and in both studies, more “native-like” repertoires were observed in those who had greater personal ties to social networks in which the languages were regularly used. In Lynch’s (2008) study, this correlation was irrespective of one’s self-identification as a Hispanic-background bilingual speaker of Spanish or as a non-Hispanic L2 speaker of the language (cf. Montrul et al. 2008).

HL speakers are of special interest to those concerned with questions about the relationships and parallels between bilingualism and SLA traditionally defined. Because they are generally exposed to the HL since birth, and in some cases acquire and use the HL exclusively during childhood, they certainly fulfill the age-of-acquisition criterion for “successful” learning of the language. However, for the majority, be they simultaneous or sequential bilinguals, the HL becomes a “secondary” language in the sense that it is not the preferred language of interaction in most settings and with most interlocutors, nor is it the politically or culturally dominant language of society and the vehicle of formal education. For this reason, Lynch (2003) proposed that four general questions guiding SLA research be taken as a basis upon which to build in studies of bilingual HL acquisition and use. These are the following: (1) What do HL learners acquire, and (2) how do they acquire it? (3) What differences are there in the way in which individual learners acquire a HL? (4) What effects does instruction have on HL acquisition? Montrul (2005) echoed Lynch’s (2003) proposal that comparative studies of L2 and HL speakers should be undertaken, asserting that: “in many respects, L1 loss in a bilingual context is the flip side of the L2 acquisition coin” (p. 201).
The potential similarities of L2 and (HL) speakers had already been hinted at by Silva-Corvalán (1990), who remarked that: “language attrition in societal bilingualism is in fact to a large extent the mirror image of development in creolization, and in first and second language acquisition.... This correspondence may in fact reflect the freezing...of the bilingual’s secondary language” (pp. 167–168). Silva-Corvalán’s (1990) thought resonated with debates that had occurred more than a decade earlier regarding the potential relationship of *interlanguage* in SLA (Selinker 1972) to theories of pidginization and creolization (Schumann 1978; Anderson 1983). While the concept of *interlanguage* is still very much present in SLA debates today, *creolization theory* was largely abandoned by SLA researchers during the 1980s. Scholars of language contact, on the other hand, have remained considerably engaged with creolization theory, though perhaps more reluctant to take up the concept of *interlanguage* or its hallmark theoretical feature “fossilization” (the persistent and apparently entrenched usage of particular forms or constructions considered incorrect, ungrammatical, or nontarget-like). Montrul (2008) discussed “arrested language development” among HL speakers, and Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998) made passing mention of the possibility of an “approximative register” or “interregister” in the speech of US Chicano bilinguals, i.e., “a variety that has characteristics similar to those discussed in Selinker” (p. 494).

**Work in Progress**

One might conjecture that had Weinreich undertaken his work in the present day, rather than in the 1940s and 1950s, he would have found himself addressing the situation of English in Switzerland – a language acquired principally in academic settings and used mostly in formal sorts of domains (i.e., commerce, finance, education, etc.) as well as through the consumption of global culture (Internet, television and film, music, etc.). In this regard, it is quite possible that bilingualism would not have been construed as a phenomenon independent of – and largely different from – SLA had the discussion begun within the past couple of decades, in the age of *globalism*. Indeed, the contemporary realities of *globalism* blur the dichotomy traditionally drawn between classroom learning (i.e., language as construct) and social use (i.e., language as practice). This is particularly true in the case of English use among younger-aged, urban, and upwardly mobile populations the world over. According to Blommaert (2010), in the age of *globalization*, it has become apparent “…that the mobility of people also involves the mobility of linguistic and sociolinguistic resources, that ‘sedentary’ or ‘territorialized’ patterns of language use are complemented by ‘translocal’ or ‘detrerritorialized’ forms of language use, and that the combination of both often accounts for unexpected sociolinguistic effects” (pp. 4–5). Blommaert suggests that, for this main reason, language must be conceptualized as “in motion” rather than as a fixed object “in place,” as was typically the case in twentieth-century paradigms of linguistics (cf. Kachru et al. 2009).
Mass migration, the advent of information and communication technologies, cyberspace, mass media, and the late capitalist “global marketplace” economy are all factors that exert definitive influences on language use patterns, linguistic variation, discursive styles, repertoires and identities, as well as ideologies of language as construct (Heller 2007). These factors may contribute to destabilizing the notion of “context” in language theory. In truth, most people do not acquire languages strictly in the classroom versus strictly outside the classroom, but in diverse sorts of settings, to different degrees. Just as many L2 learners observe and use the language beyond academic confines, most people study at least one of their “native” languages (as a separate subject) during their years of formal education. In other words, some aspects of native language acquisition and use are largely confined to academic or institutional settings, and some aspects of SLA are “naturalistic,” i.e., the language is used with “real-world” speakers in socially meaningful interactions. This is certainly true for millions of (im)migrant individuals across the globe, especially for those who develop close friendships or romantic relationships with speakers of the L2. First-generation immigrant parents usually find themselves in the very high-stakes situation of maintaining relationships with their own children through the L2, which is the socially dominant or preferred language of the latter (Pavlenko 2006). Precisely for these reasons, one must be skeptical about drawing a definitive boundary between “L2 speakers” and “bilinguals” based strictly on context.

This matter brings us to a growing area of research in recent years: identity and perception in SLA and bilingualism. For most people beyond the realm of linguistics, the question of whether one is a “native” or “nonnative” speaker of the particular language(s) used in everyday interactions with strangers may be of little concern, especially in global cities such as Miami, New York, London, Barcelona, Hong Kong, etc. As Rampton (2013) affirmed, “judgments of proficiency are themselves always relational and socio-ideologically positioned, and in a great many interactions the fact that one participant learnt to speak the language in use later in life is irrelevant to the encounter” (p. 362). Typically, it is only when a more personal or intimate social relationship begins to evolve that linguistic identity becomes relevant. In an ethnographic analysis of language use in cross-cultural marriages, Piller (2002) found that 27 out of the 73 L2 speakers of English and German included in her study reported “passing” as a native speaker of the L2 in some contexts. She observed that acts of passing were not identity related, but rather performative, contextually realized practices that were audience and medium specific (cf. Rampton 1995, on “language crossing”). She affirmed that in intimate or private contexts, “the passing performance is just the highest form of linguistic performance that expert L2 speakers are capable of but it does not involve any sort of mistaken identity at all. The audience knows that the performer is a highly skilled bilingual and native or nonnative identities just do not matter in this context” (p. 198). Piller’s conclusion echoes Roeming’s (1966) affirmation published nearly four decades earlier: “An audience will listen with interest, satisfaction and involvement to a discourse by a foreigner using the native language of the group he is addressing. . . . [M]eaning is transferred to receptive minds without consideration of barriers that in instructional settings would be causes for failure” (p. 10). In this
regard, identity as a “bilingual” or a “second language speaker” is highly contextual and depends much on settings of use and interlocutors involved.

Problems and Difficulties

Inherent in the notion of context is the distinction that must be made between explicit and implicit processes in language acquisition and use. DeKeyser (2013) explains that: “The difference that everybody can observe within one and the same immigrant family, where the children soon overtake their parents, reflects implicit acquisition processes only; adolescents and adults do not have any more problems than children with the kind of learning that is typical of most foreign language learning, on the contrary” (pp. 54–55). In other words, children often appear to be “better” L2 learners than adults in particular social settings and situations that involve more implicit types of learning, while adults appear “better” at explicit types of learning and usually find social interaction in the L2 more taxing than do children. Indeed, in classroom settings, adults appear to acquire L2s more quickly than children; due to the dearth of longitudinal research, we cannot confidently claim that ultimate attainment for child learners is generally superior to the long-term outcomes of adult learners (DeKeyser 2013). Among the proponents of a “critical period” or “fundamental difference hypothesis” (Bley-Vroman 2009), which states that the outcomes of language acquisition will be fundamentally different if the process is begun after a certain age, there is little consensus regarding its constitution or cause. Is an apparent “critical period” attributable to maturational phenomena of cognition and experience, to biological constraints posed by neuroanatomical development, or to social phenomena of identity and opportunities for exposure, input, and use? Or is ultimate attainment determined by the complex interplay of all of these factors?

Some scholars have proposed different critical periods for different language modules (phonology, syntax, semantics), with the apparent “cut-off” age for phonology earlier than that for syntax. Knightly et al. (2003) observed that Spanish heritage language (HL) speakers (i.e., English-dominant Hispanic bilinguals) were significantly more “native-like” on phonological measures than L2 learners. However, the two groups performed essentially the same on grammaticality judgment tasks and narrative tasks, leading these authors to conclude that early childhood acquisition of the HL brought phonological advantages but not morpho-syntactic advantages. However, in a more fine-grained phonological analysis of Spanish HL speakers in which he distinguished between those who spoke the language regularly, those who spoke it only during early childhood, and those who were only minimally exposed to or overheard the language during childhood, Rao (2015) observed that the pronunciation of HL speakers in his study was comparable to that reported in some studies of Spanish L2 speakers. In light of this finding, Rao emphasized that duration and extent of exposure to the language during adulthood – and not just childhood – is a crucial variable conditioning phonological production.

The relative contradiction of findings between the studies of Knightly et al. (2003) and Rao (2015) is but one example of the source of DeKeyser’s
(2013) concern regarding the purported critical period, to wit: across studies, there is a wide range of conceptual and methodological approaches, and conclusions are based on highly disparate samples taken from very limited strata of the population (mostly classroom L2 learners). Reaching any consensus regarding age effects is precluded by the lack of control of fundamental variables, similar instrumentation, and methodological procedures. Just as one can assert that some researchers have provided good and convincing empirical evidence in support of a “critical period” or fundamental difference hypothesis (particularly in terms of phonology), one must also assert that other researchers have offered good and convincing empirical evidence against such a hypothesis. At this point, the most truthful conclusion is that there is no clear consensus regarding the alleged disadvantages of learning a language beyond childhood vis-à-vis the purported advantages of being exposed to a language early in life, as in the case of HL speakers (cf. Benmamoun et al. 2013a, b).

Within the four decades separating Roeming and Piller’s articles, and in the years since the latter, numerous scholars (notably among them Cook 1992, and Firth and Wagner 1997) have remarked upon the inadequacies and biases inherent in the construct of proficiency as implemented in both institutional practice and language research. Just as the assessment of bilingual proficiency remains highly enigmatic still more than 20 years after Valdés and Figueroa’s (1994) compelling criticism of the native speaker construct in the measurement of bilingualism, a reliable, nuanced, and objective method of appraising the language proficiency of advanced and “near-native” L2 speakers still eludes SLA researchers and practitioners. As Piller (2002) wrote, “While it is clear that it is neither scientifically nor ethically sound to measure ultimate attainment against native speaker baseline data, the prevailing disregard of expert L2 users has led to a situation where we do not have any idea of what other yardstick to use” (p. 181). For that reason, Piller took as criterion the self-identification and reported incidence of “passing for native” among nearly 40 % of L2 users in her study, pointing out that many began to study the language after puberty and most reported not encountering it in natural social settings until adulthood (average age of 20.9 years). Rampton (2013) highlighted three factors that should be accounted for in claims regarding L2 status and proficiency: (1) the way speakers classify themselves and the ways that they are classified by local others; (2) the speech of those who inhabit the same environment; and (3) situated expectations with regard to particular interlocutors, interpreters, analysts, genres, and footings (361). Concerning the second dimension, Rampton pointed out that in diasporic settings, “what sounded foreign 30 years ago may now no longer do so” (p. 362).

**Future Directions**

As late modernity ensues (see Heller 2007) and neuroscience advances, language researchers will likely make significant strides toward establishing a better founded understanding of the phenomena that lie somewhere in the fold of bilingualism and SLA as they are currently defined. Although the brain still remains largely a mystery,
a growing body of research has begun to debunk the notion of a biologically based critical period and reveal the crucial importance of social exposure and use, and concomitantly, degree of proficiency. Abutalebi et al. (2009) have affirmed that these factors appear to condition neural activity during language processing and use more significantly than age of acquisition: “The available evidence indicates that an L2 seems to be acquired through the same neural structures responsible for L1 acquisition. This observation extends to grammar acquisition in late L2 learners contrary to what one may expect from critical period accounts” (pp. 51–52). Abutalebi and colleagues’ call for more longitudinal, socially based evidence in neurolinguistic research concurs with the recommendations of DeKeyser (2013) regarding the study of age effects in language acquisition. The former stated that: “[R]esearchers should put more effort on extended longitudinal investigations addressing the natural course of L2 acquisition (follow-up studies in L2 teaching classrooms). … [T]here is an apparent lack of interest toward one of the factors that crucially influences the neural basis of L2 processing: the relative exposure toward a language” (Abutalebi et al. 2009, p. 53).

In a recent editorial for the journal Behavioral Neurology, Abutalebi and Weekes (2014) highlighted that, in the age of globalization, bilingualism will become ever more prevalent. Quite clearly, their definition of the “bilingual” individual in the global era was highly inclusive of L2 users:

In general, a bilingual speaker may be someone with different levels of proficiency in the two languages, using the two languages in different contexts or learning a new language due to educational requirements, immigration, or other business and life demands. By this definition, a bilingual individual is not only necessarily someone who has acquired both languages from birth, or early in life, but also one who learns a second language (L2) later in life. (p. 1)

From a sociolinguistic perspective, Rampton (2013) made a strikingly similar statement: “as the old predictabilities dissolve in contemporary globalized super-diversity, and as it becomes more and more difficult to find the co-occurrences of people, acts, and signs that we once expected, empirical analyses tuned to the total linguistic fact will become increasingly important” (p. 377). These recent affirmations by leading scholars from two distinct fields of linguistic inquiry (i.e., neurocognitive linguistics and sociolinguistics), which throughout the twentieth century were rather “opposed” at times, are suggestive of an emergent common ground – with highly mutual interests – for language research in the decades ahead. Within a more global or “postmodern” paradigm, accounting for what Rampton refers to as the “total linguistic fact,” L2 users are unquestionably bilinguals.

Cross-References

▶ Issues in Heritage Language Learning the United States
▶ Sociolinguistics and Language Education
Related Articles in the Encyclopedia of Language and Education

Tae-Hee Choi: Identity, Transnationalism and Bilingual Education. In Volume: Bilingual and Multilingual Education
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