

Rethinking curriculum in the linguistics component of a major on bilingual education¹

Repensar el currículo en el componente lingüístico de
un pregrado en educación bilingüe

Carlos Arias-Cepeda and Sandra Rojas²
Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana- Única

Abstract

The aim of this article is to report the partial findings resulting from a phenomenological study that intends to document the theoretical and empirical sources to inform a curricular proposal for the linguistic component of a major on bilingual education. From the theoretical point of view, this paper will present several perspectives about curriculum in tertiary education and the role of linguistics in a major on bilingual education. As for the empirical data, the paper will document how some professors in the second language teaching and linguistics fields, when analyzing the linguistic component of the curriculum in the major, advocate for a conscious use of metalanguage, the choice of content that empower student teachers to build their praxis and compete in their field, the use of the first and second language for instruction, and a switch towards the problematic nature of the object of study rather than the subdiscipline fragmentation of knowledge. This paper also triangulates some of the participants' perspectives with existing theory in an attempt to reach more informed grounds for a curricular proposal.

Key words: linguistics, curriculum, bilingual education, tertiary education.

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es reportar los resultados parciales derivados de un estudio fenomenológico que intenta documentar las fuentes teóricas y

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² carlos.ariasc@yahoo.com.co/ slrojasm@gmail.com

empíricas que sustentan una eventual propuesta curricular para el componente lingüístico de un programa de pregrado en educación bilingüe. Desde el punto de vista teórico este artículo presentará algunas perspectivas acerca del currículo en la educación terciaria y del papel de la lingüística en un pregrado de educación bilingüe. En cuanto a los datos empíricos, el documento reportará cómo profesores en las áreas de la enseñanza de una segunda lengua y de la lingüística, cuando analizan el componente lingüístico en el currículo del programa de pregrado, advocan el uso consciente de metalenguaje, la selección de contenidos que empoderen a los futuros docentes para construir su praxis y competir en su campo del conocimiento, el uso de la primera y segunda lengua como códigos y objetos de instrucción en lingüística y un cambio de enfoque hacia la naturaleza problemática del objeto de estudio en lugar de la fragmentación subdisciplinar del conocimiento. Este escrito además triangula algunas de las perspectivas de los participantes con la teoría existente con el objetivo de lograr unas bases más sólidas para la propuesta curricular.

Palabras clave: lingüística, currículo, educación bilingüe, educación terciaria.

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é reportar os resultados parciais derivados de um estudo fenomenológico que tenta documentar as fontes teóricas e empíricas que sustentam uma eventual proposta curricular para o componente linguístico de um programa de graduação em educação bilíngue. Desde o ponto de vista teórico, este artigo apresentará algumas perspectivas acerca do currículo na educação terciária e do papel da linguística em uma graduação de educação bilíngue. Em relação aos dados empíricos, o documento reportará como professores nas áreas do ensino de uma segunda língua e da linguística, quando analisam o componente linguístico no currículo do programa de graduação, defendem o uso consciente da metalinguagem, a seleção de conteúdos que dê poder aos futuros docentes para construir a sua práxis e concorrer na sua área de conhecimento, o uso da primeira e segunda língua como códigos e objetos de instrução em linguística e uma mudança de enfoque com relação à natureza problemática do objeto de estudo em vez da fragmentação subdisciplinar do conhecimento. Este escrito também triangula algumas das perspectivas dos participantes com a teoria existente com o objetivo de conseguir umas bases mais sólidas para a proposta curricular.

Palavras chave: linguística, currículo, educação bilíngue, educação terciária.

Introduction

Curriculum does not only work as a static and monolithic document that dictates the selection, organization, and delivery of contents based on the conceptual basis, the underlying theory, and the praxis to (Gimeno & Pérez, 2008), but rather it works as an active process in which continuous planning, acting and evaluating are intrinsically related to the teaching praxis (Grundy, 1987). Based on this fluid nature, it seems intrinsic to the nature of curriculum that those who enact it take a leading role in reflecting on it, reconceptualizing it, revising the scope of its achievements and redesigning it.

The rationale behind curricular innovation could be triggered by the problematization of the knowledge discipline, the role of instruction, or the role of individuals in society. In fact the logical dynamics of knowledge production result in the obsolescence and banalization of contents (CEPAL, 1992), which might inform curricular revision. A pivotal factor in explaining a curricular update of content, is the progress in teacher's development (Diaz, 2003) -be it the result of teaching experience or further academic appropriation. Currently, the need to empower individuals to exercise citizenship and be more competitive (Dussel, 2005) is a tenet that also drives attempts for curriculum innovation.

The study reported in this article aimed at the gathering of principles to inform a proposal for the linguistic component of the curriculum in a ten- semester long undergraduate program on Bilingual Education (Spanish-English) at a private college in Bogotá. Putting together a proposal for the linguistics curricular component of the major was a response to teachers' and students' perception of overlapping of linguistic contents, as well as to the need to strengthen student-teachers' grounding on linguistics to boost their decision making as language learners, language users, and language (and content) educators.

When conducting the study, the main purpose was to identify principles that could be used to inform a proposal that cared about the choice of contents, didactic practices, and practices within the linguistics component of the curriculum. Thus, in its initial documentation stage the study resorted to three sources of data: i) a quest of the literature on the theoretical principles for the teaching/learning of linguistics in bilingual education majors; ii) the emic intersubjective perspective of graduates from the university regarding their needs and the assets resulting from their learning of linguistics in the undergraduate program; iii) the emic intersubjective perspective of professors teaching either second language, linguistics, or pedagogy. The principles were eventually

applied to the crafting of a proposal that was piloted and implemented as part of the curricular innovation that is allowed and promoted through the curricular committee's maneuvering, this article is focused particularly on the stage previous to the crafting of the proposal.

Literature review

The covert interests behind curriculum construction

The extensiveness of the conceptual terrain that can be embraced by the term curriculum, which can be blurry enough to include dissimilar features such as the disciplinary content of a subject, the program of study, the students' experiences of learning, and the dynamics of teaching and learning (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006; Posner, 2005). Such inclusiveness offers space for the emergence of a critical perspective that considers curriculum as the space in which, by making choices about content and conceptualizing about education in a field, there is a struggle of power centers and social forces (Englund & Quennerstedt, 2008). This means that curriculum and curricular change are conceived as intrinsically related to the social, the economic, and the political forces that generate curriculum and curricular change (Murphy & Adams, 1998).

O'Neill (2015) acknowledged that curriculum design is marked by the influence of contextual filters which include the international, the national, the institutional, and the program and disciplinary regulations. These contextual filters can be enacted by means of formal, implicit, or prudential policies (Kridel, 2010) and shape and instrumentalize the purposes of curriculum at the tertiary level through controlling curricular change at the mechanisms such as the involvement of universities in dynamics beyond the institutional domain; namely, practices of accountability like the quality accreditation processes, examinations, qualifications, and the establishment of authoritative figures (García & Malagón, 2010; Diaz, 2003).

The instrumentalization of curriculum at the national level aims at materializing the intrinsic correlation between human thought and production dynamics. Schooling reinforces the social anatomy of the nation through two context levels: a production context (material or symbolic) by which curriculum aims at constructing interpretations of material objects, knowledge, and social relations based on the premise of satisfying the needs of the existing social structures; and a reproduction context which aims at the transmission of an education that replicates the conditions of production despite the generation shifts, thus giving

curriculum an instrumental nature in the task of preserving the national social structures (Lundgreen, 1992).

On the other hand, the global filter, particularly at the tertiary level of education, instills the choice of contents and teaching/learning approaches that aim at allowing or even promoting the mobility of learners (O'Neill, 2015). Bentolila, Pedranzani, & Clavijo (2007) explain this as a logical consequence of the discursive construct of the global village, the neoliberal policies, and the dizzying pace of ICTs, which subject knowledge, as it happens with capital, to worldwide transactions.

A critique to the instrumentalization of curriculum

Claussen & Osborne (2013) and Bourdieu (2000) argue that the formal education system is used to legitimize knowledge by means of imposing the cultural capital of a ruling social group to the rest of the social structure – which can be named as a ‘cultural arbitrary’ (Bourdieu, 1986), an epistemologic injustice (González, 2015) or hermeneutic marginalization (Fricker, 2007). This “contributes towards reproducing the power relations” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977 p. 31) and becomes a gatekeeper that discriminates between those individuals who have belonged to the privileged social group from which the cultural capital chosen has been accumulated through their habitus, and those for whom owing this capital is rather an institutionalized demand (Jenkins, 2002). Nonetheless, such cultural arbitrary is disguised in discourses of essentialism and intrinsic merit of contents emerging from the choice, which aims at a normalization discourse in education (Foucault, 2006).

Schooling achievement, then is influenced by social inequality making education as a good to be traded, which is exemplified by parents having to pay for complementary educational services to make sure their children fit and do well in schooling (García & Malagón (2010). Nonetheless, Claussen & Osborne (2013) consider that schooling should keep a focus on those students “whose habitus does not readily provide access to the dominant forms of cultural capital” (p. 64) and try to alleviate and challenge the ‘symbolic violence’ emerging from the choice of a dominant cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) by strengthening the literacy, knowledge, and criticality of the underprivileged populace.

Thus, as ironic as it might seem, it is by exposing the underprivileged to the discourses of the dominant cultural capital that social mobility can be made possible (Brown, 2006). Curriculum,

paradoxically, becomes a factor that both helps individuals conform to the existing social structures and emancipate from them, and it is through this clash between freedom and conformance that curriculum/schooling are shaping the agentic roles of learners.

Curriculum as the space of convergence of cognitive and social interests

The recognition of schooling and, therefore, curriculum as instrumental to the preservation of the existing social structures implies that curricular innovation also becomes a space of permanent power struggles. Curricular innovation, then, is like a game where the participants need to acknowledge the cultural capitals (related to knowledge, ideas, values, etc.) that are at stake and be willing to compete by using their habitus to abide by the rules of the game (Bourdieu, 2003).

The transformation of cognition can set ground for social transformation; thus the social interests behind the construction of curriculum also end up shaping and being shaped by cognitive interests. To that respect Habermas' (1984) acknowledgement of three cognitive interests is very illustrative: the *technical* cognitive interest considers knowledge as simply owned, transmitted, and accumulated; whereas the *practical* cognitive interest offers space for interpretative approaches in the pursuit of using knowledge to improve reality. The *emancipatory* cognitive interest allows individuals to acknowledge and challenge the existence of hypostatized powers in the pursuit of free consciousness.

Grundy (1987), who applied Habermas' cognitive interests to the understanding of curriculum, described technical interests taking the form of classes in which technical interests predominate, thus giving a crucial role to the possibility of controlling the environment through empirical rule-following action. Such curricular attitude towards knowledge results in an implicit interest in controlling pupils' learning. In this way the approach towards their citizenship (their knowing, their doing, and their being) is a conformist one.

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Grundy (1987) also defined the practical interest as fundamental "...in understanding the environment through interaction based upon a consensual understanding of meaning" (p. 14). A practical interest then gives a more agentic role to the dialogic nature of knowledge construction and highlights the importance of interaction as not limited to the top-down transmission of knowledge (Popkewitz, 2008). Instead, the focus is on the generation of novel understandings of the world and society and the

development of abilities that ease the discovery and inquiry; the emphasis is less on what the individuals should *know*, and has shifted more towards what they should do or be like (McEneaney, 2003).

Regarding the emancipator cognitive interest, Grundy (1987) considered it as “a fundamental interest in emancipation and empowerment to engage in autonomous action arising out of authentic, critical insights into the social construction of human society” (p. 19). Thus, this perspective genuinely intends to bridge the disciplinary nature of curricular content with the problem solving required to make a fairer society.

Reflecting about the linguistics component of curriculum

Adopting an informed perspective on what the linguistics component of the curriculum should be like in a major on bilingual teaching is essential provided that such epistemological choice will not just become instrumental to the learning/teaching of (a) language(s), but ultimately will have an effect on the theoretical appropriation of language, the framework for the production of knowledge in the field, and the pedagogical decisions that learners and teachers should make. Therefore, it is not enough for linguistics to be made explicit, linguistics problematization should also shift from the positivistic approach to theoretical linguistics, and even further to an interpretative one that can generate new knowledge within a socio ethnographic description of learning realities, thus reaching even applied linguistics (within a critical framework, also) to the teaching of languages.

Explicit linguistic instruction seems to be a reasonable choice for the learning of a second language due to pedagogical and theoretical grounds. Examples include the examination of the belief that exposure to metalanguage along with communicative practice can facilitate a shift from the declarative to the procedural knowledge of a given language feature (Ellis, 2007), or the seemingly contradictory view that explicit linguistic instruction will only generate metalinguistic knowledge, without contributing much to the acquisition of implicit knowledge (Doughty, 2003).

This dialogue between pedagogy, English and Spanish as objects of study, and linguistics is necessary due to the demands of a professional identity of bilingual teachers. The implicit needs of such identity include the development of high order thinking and communicative skills in both languages, as well as the understanding of what language is (both as contextually-independent and as contextually-situated), and

the understanding of educational principles that align with the learning and teaching of languages.

Regarding the distinctive learning needs of a major on second language education, Correa (2014) acknowledges that learning linguistics in this kind of major differs from learning linguistics in a major on linguistics in English. Also Treffers-Daller (2003) claims that, whereas the learning of linguistic content in major on linguistics works on generating knowledge about cognition, learning linguistics in a major on second language education is pivotal in facilitating the language learning process of those who will eventually teach language

Nonetheless, it is not just the learning of the second/foreign language that is boosted thanks to the inclusion of linguistic contents in the curriculum of a bilingual education major. It is unfair to expect the linguistic course in a language department to merely work as an instrument to facilitate language learning. In fact, the knowledge of linguistics also empowers pre service teachers in terms of their eventual teaching of the second language, since knowing the metalanguage can become the asset with which non- native speaker teachers compete in a field where the learner tends to favor the native-speaker and his/her intuitive authority as language users-even if they do not hold language teaching majors (Correa, 2014).

Going beyond the positivistic approach towards the role of linguistics in the learning and teaching of a second language, Widdowson (2000) acknowledges that being fully knowledgeable of metalinguistic knowledge does not guarantee success in language teaching. Ellis (2012) seems to agree when asserting that having a vast command of a language is not enough for the purpose of teaching it either. Effective language teaching then might be the result of solid of reflective practices in the learning of a triad of contents that includes language pedagogy, applied linguistics, and theoretical linguistics as its pillars (Johnston & Goettsch, 2000).

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The development of a professional identity for bilingual education teachers implies somehow a new epistemological viewstand. One in which there is not the classical detachment between subject and object to be studied. This makes sense considering that knowledge about linguistics will eventually be more than the sheer content that will be used in the teaching, but also, as noted before, it constitutes a relevant resource for the development of the individual's identity as a learner and teacher to be.

Thus, it is keen to consider that devising the linguistic curricular component for the undergraduate program implies shifting from the

positivistic epistemology (which prescribes teaching recipes) to the interpretative epistemology (which advocates for the ethnographic descriptions of classroom learning realities), as Johnston (2009) suggests. Such epistemological shift will allow to consider the three dimensions of learning: the declarative knowledge (*savoir*), the procedural knowledge, or know-how (*savoir faire*), and the existential competence (*savoir être*), as Delors (1996) would acknowledge.

This three- dimensional understanding of linguistic knowledge urges for an understanding of linguistics within the linguistics turn, which is rooted in the discipline itself, to generate ways of knowing about the language, but also to frame the knowledge within the social sciences. This latter approach will help learners/teachers-to-be understand language as a social phenomenon that is highly situational and contextually- dependent. Furthermore, the path should be explicitly open for understanding the post- structural, and post-colonial turn that unveils the historical complexities between linguistics and colonialism and the call for linguistics and epistemological justice (Pennycook, 2001).

Therefore, it would be savvy to adopt a new conception of the linguistics component of the curriculum that aligns with such understanding. Ultimately, the approach that is given to curriculum will not be just accountable for the mastery of the language, and the existing language methodologies but will also result in the development of bilingual teachers' identities (Kumaradivelu, 2003) as passive technicians (whose teaching practices will be led by others' expertise) reflective practitioners (who are not just consumers of knowledge, but also producers of knowledge who deal with problem solving in their immediate teaching settings) and/ or as transformative intellectuals (who take active part in curriculum development efforts and challenge the existing social structures).

Methodology

Research design

The study is framed into a qualitative research paradigm that allows the intertwining of facts and values (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) that tandem with the dialogic construction of knowledge to gather the data to answer to the question:

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Which theoretical and empirical sources can be used in the proposal of restructuring of the linguistic component of the undergraduate program on bilingual education?

Such inquiry implied the need of resorting to i) the theoretical constructs that can inform a proposal to reform the linguistic component of curriculum, and ii) the validation of experiences and needs observed by professors (with experience teaching linguistics and/or second language at the tertiary level of education in similar majors) and graduates (from the bilingual education program at the university) as input to be considered in the crafting of a curriculum proposal for the linguistics of the major. The construction of the principles that make up the curriculum proposal seen through the lens of multiple individuals (researchers' appropriation of literature included) imply that the approach being followed is a phenomenological one (Creswell, 1998).

Context and participants

The study was conducted at a Bilingual education teachers' college in Bogotá, Colombia. At the moment that the study started, the existing contents in the curriculum included subjects that dealt with linguistics from the social/post structural turn in the beginning of the major. Content such as 'Intercultural communication', 'communication theory', or 'sociolinguistics' was dealt with in the early stages of the major. The classes were conducted in the foreign language in the pursuit of helping learners develop language through content and content through language. No linguistics subject was being taught in the learners' first language. Besides, towards the seventh semester students were exposed to systemic linguistics classes (where they were expected to learn about language as a system).

The intention of the study is to inform an eventual curriculum proposal for the linguistic component of the major without sacrificing the existing quality of the student-teachers as certified by positive results obtained in Pruebas Saber Pro and MIDE, which are two standardized high stakes assessment procedures from the MEN (National Ministry of Education) in aspects like critical reading and written communication, and way above the reference group in English. The main concern is offering an informed proposal for the restructuring of the linguistics curriculum with the premise of maintaining, and, if possible, improving the evident quality of the education offered till then by the college in its curriculum design and curricular practices.

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The participants in this research included 8 linguistic and language teachers with experience in EFL (English as a foreign language) education majors, 5 graduates with a highly reflective profile and a furtherly developed career path. There was a phenomenological convenience sampling; professors and graduates' profile allowed their

informed reflection based on experience and knowledge of pedagogy, languages and linguistics with an emic (insider's) perspective due to either having taught at similar majors (in the case of professors) or having graduated from the college and pursued a career in teaching (which for most of the participants included even further graduate studies).

From interviewing the students, graduates, and teachers, one could read that this approach to linguistics seemed to generate both satisfying results in the generation of a professional identity but also some setbacks (namely overlapping contents, or the feeling that the understanding of language as a system came in too late in students' learning path). Graduates' perceptions towards their linguistic learning allowed the emergence of a consciousness of language and linguistics as a body of knowledge that they had often accumulated declaratively, but which was difficult to manipulate for the purposes of handling with 'out of the norm' challenges when teaching the language (e.g. the challenge of helping large classes learn the pronunciation of th sounds or simple past, the teaching of third person conjugation in present tense, etc.).

Data collection instruments

The study was conducted by resorting to three main sources of data, intending to gain insight on the theoretical and empirical sources that could be used in the proposal of restructuration of the linguistic component of the undergraduate program on bilingual education (which the research question aimed at). The three main sources of data were: i) literature and state of the art (related to curriculum, linguistics, and ESL/ bilingual education teaching), ii) interviews to 8 teachers, linguists, and professors who have experience teaching linguistics and/ or second language at the level of tertiary education, and iii) interviews to 6 college graduates with solid academic profile and experience teaching.

The data collected from the sources was used for the purpose of addressing theory, experience, and expectations and also to align with the vision of a curriculum that can address the educational, the experiential, and the existential dimensions (Council of Europe, 2010), as explained in the review of the literature.

Results

The metalinguistic discourse permits the belonging to a society of knowledge

Metalinguistic knowledge allows student–teachers to resort to theory and research- based explanations for their learning and eventual teaching of language(s), and also permits that they generate knowledge in the EFL field by being able to name and document their own learning and teaching experiences as a valid researchable sources. The participants pointed out that learning the metalanguage resulting from instruction on linguistics facilitates the development of knowledge.

“A common discourse facilitates the cognitive divulgation, the academic rigor, and the acceptance within the academic community.” (Interviewee 2).

Such perspective seems to be theoretically backed up since language teacher education does have a tradition of including training on linguistics (LaFond & Dogancay-Aktuna, 2009), and at the tertiary level education programs do not give much value to superficial knowledge that is purely declarative (Biggs & Tang, 2007). Through their learning of linguistics, student- teachers gain 'knowledge of how language is structured, acquired, and used'(Johnson & Golombek, 2002, p. 8) and empower themselves to be able to understand and diagnose student problems better, provide better explanations and representations for aspects of language, and have a clearer idea of what they are teaching (Bartels, 2005).

The metalanguage facilitates that language educators rationalize their role as language acquirers, language users, and language makers (Gomes de Matos, 2014), thus boosting their opportunities of generating new knowledge about language. It is this epistemological dimension in which the knowledgeable subject is as important as the object to apprehend in which knowing the linguistic terms can offer an agentive role to the student-teacher as a source of linguistic knowledge and boost him/her as a researcher. As an example, despite the fact that research on linguistics has resorted to the consolidation of linguistic corpora (an initiative that might be rooted in the quantitative approach), there is need for an inquirer, someone who intuitively asks questions, generates hypotheses, and interprets data departing from the linguistic corpus data (Kabatek, 2014).

Cots and Arnó (2005) view the language teacher as a professional who fulfils roles involved in language, linguistics, and teaching, thus being a language user, a language analyst, and a language teacher. The pre-service teacher does not come as a tabula rasa, neither does s/he

simply analyze linguistic data. S/he is an empathic linguist (Kabatek, 2014): a language user and language maker who in his/her own activity as speaker –hearer develops the ability to identify noteworthy phenomena not just from the (system) language itself but also from the languages s/he knows and learns.

As bilingual beings who have acquired a mother tongue and have taken instruction to learn a foreign language, the pre-service teachers have a metalinguistic background that allows them to analyze their language use, identify deviations of norms, categorize and hypothesize phenomena, and inquire systematically to generate new knowledge of language, languages, and language teaching/learning. The premise is that the speakers can observe their own linguistic activity and judge not just whether a sentence is grammatically correct or not, but also can generate contrastive linguistic inquiries, and can examine learning from an *emic*, experiential view point that can later inform their instruction, and eventually generate knowledge about the content (linguistics), its teaching, and its learning.

The need for a balance between homogeneity and heterogeneity in the choice of content

Participants agree that the choice of content for the linguistic component of the major needs to be coherent with the vision that the institution ascribes to the role language and linguistics in the construction of the professional profile of its graduates. Such vision must keep a balance between homogeneity and heterogeneity when compared to the value given to linguistics by similar majors in other universities.

Homogeneity of content choice (choosing contents similar to the ones provided by similar majors in other universities) guarantees that the graduate from the college will be competitive when compared to other professionals in the field:

“A language program needs a serious foundation on linguistics... four, five, six subjects of linguistics that have contents that are established everywhere. Generally, there is a course of sociolinguistics. Which are the topics of a sociolinguistics class? The same ones everywhere... the socio-phonetic variables, socio-lexical variables, socio- grammatical variables, bilingualism, etc. That means that there are some topics in the linguistic courses that are instructed worldwide at the undergraduate level. Contents are relatively standardized” (Interviewee 1).

This participant argues that homogeneity is a requirement that allows graduates to be ready to compete at the local and the international academic contexts:

“If one deviates from the common contents, it is likely that the graduates become less competitive at the international level, and that is relatively harmful” (Interviewee 1).

Such homogeneity in the choice of content (when compared to other similar majors in other universities) seems to be applicable to the study of language from an intradisciplinary perspective, which seems to align with Pastor’s (2001) idea that a *sine qua non* choice in linguistic contents is the understanding of language as a system—Phonology and phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics. Such kind of intradisciplinary perspective is also favored by the content choice of similar majors in Latin America.

Heterogeneity of content choice, on the other hand, can result in the generation of an added value for the major when compared to other competitors in the area.

“The program profile is established by the universities when they state “We want this sort of professionals.” The subjects are chosen based on such profile. Even optative subjects are chosen based on it. They can offer a course on conversation analysis, a course on linguistics applied to computerized teaching of languages... there are numberless courses that can be created in that space...they are some sort of identity mark, an added value”. (Interviewee 1)

The offer of either compulsory or elective courses on some of the sub- disciplines of linguistics seems to be for this participant one of the reasons why a conscious content choice can strengthen the university identity giving the learners competitive advantages over other colleagues once they graduate.

Changing the focus: Problematizing rather than specializing content

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Nonetheless, (and radical though it might seem) another participant asserts that it is not necessary to label the linguistic courses (e.g. phonetics, syntax, etc.), since by naming them one is arbitrarily isolating instruction and producing some sort of fragmentation of knowledge. She considers that such fragmentation does no guarantee learning.

“If it is necessary to include labels, they should be thought always as the result of the binding emerging from problems found in the teaching praxis”. (Interviewee 5).

This latter participant (along with what could be read from the data collected of other participants) inclines for a change of focus that prioritizes the problematic nature of instruction over the sub- discipline level of content specialization.

The relevance of theoretical and structural content, according to the participants’ opinions, could/ should be accompanied by a practical focus:

“In the didactics of linguistics, one has the possibility of making the student- teachers work on concrete problems from day one of instruction (...) Concrete problems that can be solved the very moment explanatory instruction is provided” (Interviewee 1).

This convergence on content as resulting from the problematization of the object of study advocates for a synthetic approach (rather than an analytic one) to the generation of knowledge. This based on the fact that reality is not as fragmented as the sub- discipline specialization of content implies. From that view, curricular proposals should depart from the object of study and its problematic nature to eventually allow the convergence of the disciplines and sub-disciplines in a field for the appropriation of knowledge.

“The labeling of content subjects is a fatidic fact since it compartmentalizes knowledge. It separates phonetics from semantics, and both from pragmatics, instead of joining them. The isolation of contents results in a poor, less meaningful, learning. If it is necessary to label the subjects, such labeling should be thought as the result of the connections and be always based on problems that have been determined in the teaching practice. Phonetics connects with English and its teaching- . It is difficult to understand how a first semester learner can start to learn English without getting familiar with the sounds, without distinguishing which sounds we do not have in Spanish. That is why they always say /tri/ to mean the number. If phonetics is not worked communicatively from the beginning such familiarization is difficult” (Interviewee 5).

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A bilingual student-teacher needs ample knowledge of the structure of the language and its usage, but also competences to apply such knowledge to his/her immediate reality. The learning and teaching problems that emerge out of experience can urge the individual to join a systematic and collective search for solutions. Joining a research group, for instance, allows students to acknowledge and appropriate the links

between disciplines and thus find meaning for their learning events (Jurado, 2014). The teaching and learning challenges occurring inside the classroom and the teachers and students' approach to them become valuable input for the teacher to exert his/her role as a responsible active citizen who will not be a giver of methodology or content, but rather someone who will understand his /her profession as subjected to constant change.

Code of instruction: Using the 'language as a resource' perspective rather than the 'language as a problem' when teaching linguistics in a bilingual education major

The 'language as a resource' perspective (Baker, 2006) conceptualizes language diversity as a capital promoted by the discourse of human capital flow and global citizenship (Rasool 2004). For the purpose of understanding linguistics and the knowledge of language as a cultural construction, as vehicle of cognition and as a functional system, the fact that the learners can resort to two languages (L1 and L2) should be considered an advantage and not a problem.

The language (tongue) used to get knowledge of language should be a solid instrument and not an obstacle. Learners must be able to use the language they are using as code of instruction for a linguistics class as a tangible materialization to recognize linguistic phenomena (e.g. distinguishing allophones), make grammatical judgments, or simply understand content of theoretical linguistics; however, after even some 6 or 7 semesters of instruction in a second language, students are not fully capable of doing all of this in the L2 (Correa, 2014).

Five of the participants acknowledged that it is necessary to approach the understanding of the language by departing from the mother tongue as the vehicle of instruction, and then, progressively, incorporating the foreign language.

"I would lean for formal teaching of linguistics in the first language and then to deepen it in the second language" (Interviewee 1).

"It is important that the learner have knowledge in the mother tongue and then use it to move on to the second language" (Interviewee 2).

Such position does not exclude the learning of linguistics in the early stages of the EFL learning:

"It is necessary that both codes play a role in the early stages of formation in an alternate and balanced manner" (Interviewee 3).

Nonetheless, for one of the participants it is pivotal that the content of linguistics be not detached from the learning of the language(s) (the L1 and L2), neither should it be detached from research or pedagogy.

An integrative perspective as such in the learning of linguistics is intended to facilitate the understanding of the linguistic features of the mother tongue, the language being learned, and the more informed choice of tools so that the linguistic knowledge boosts eventual pedagogical decisions and the critical analysis of theories of bilingualism in the immediate and further contexts.

This set of opinions from the interviewed participants suggests that we avoid demonizing any of the linguistic codes (languages) in any stage of linguistics teaching. One of the participants even suggests that the learning of linguistics be aided by professionals in the two languages:

“We should understand bilingualism as the co-existence of two linguistic codes in perfect harmony, thus both codes should be accepted. Two languages in one same subject- English classes with readings in Spanish, and the other way around, for example.” (Interviewee 4).

This interviewee’s opinion validates both languages as the objects and means of study linguistic phenomena; language is viewed both as human construction and a capability (Jiménez, 2011) that is worth looking in depth at.

Pastor (2001) considers the contrastive analysis of languages essential to disentangle the linguistic distance between first and second language thus improving our acknowledgement of the most common mistakes caused by language interference. That seems to be in agreement with one of the participants’ perspective, who advocates for not demonizing the use of the first language:

“We need to make the bilingual student- teacher understand that the two languages are not a threat to one another but there are mechanisms of construction of knowledge in a language that can be used in the learning of the other one. It is important that the educators then be ‘very bilingual’ in order to help understand such mechanisms. The native Spanish speaker who has a very competitive command of English and has gone through the exercise of analyzing his own language and the one he has been learning, can really help the bilingual learner” (Interviewee 5).

Thus, the first language is a resource that can be used not just as a vehicle to transmit the knowledge of linguistics but also as an instrument to understand language’s system and structure more

tangible. Besides, the use of the L1 as the code for linguistic content can facilitate the appropriation of the concepts and its application to generate more sophisticated knowledge of the mother tongue and further its sophisticated development. The beliefs of experienced teachers, include the idea that a solid knowledge of the first language should be fostered, since it facilitates an eventual contrastive analysis with the L2 (Cortés, Cárdenas & Nieto 2013).

Conclusions

Linguistic instruction in bilingual education has mostly been problematized from an intra-disciplinary edge with contents that consider language as a functional system (phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics, etc.), and as a discipline that is fed with interdisciplinary contents (which signals the ties that linguistics has with other fields of knowledge from the social sciences resulting in sub disciplinary labels such as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, neurolinguistics, etc.). However, the curricular needs of bilingual teachers urge for an appropriation of applied linguistics, and particularly linguistics for the teaching of (content in) English for speakers of Spanish as a mother tongue. Decisions to innovate in the existing curriculum of an undergraduate program on bilingual education cannot be taken, not even proposed, without having a responsible glance at the myriad of sources that from theory and from experience can inform a curriculum proposal.

Both literature and participants converge in the principle that linguistics is necessary for such a major, but that not any linguistics, but one linguistic approach that matches the needs of bilingual student-teachers. That is, linguistic contents that are not solely chosen on the basis of the traditional fragmentation of knowledge, but rather based on the problematic nature of the object of study: the language, and the languages. Thus, the particularity of the academic bilingual context implies the recognition of both languages not just as valid codes of instruction, but also as examples of the materialization of the principles by which language as a human construct works.

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The restructuring of the linguistic component of the curriculum can be fed with the pedagogies used in teaching in general, and in the teaching of the second language in particular. Such conclusion also resulting from the data analyzed out of interviews carried out, can be gathered to align with principles of constructivism, the competences of the 21st century, problem based learning, project and task based learning, linguistics as an instrument for the construction of peace, and the organization of contents by departing from thematic units that foster authentic performance.

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Authors

***Carlos Augusto Arias-Cepeda** holds an M.A. in Applied Linguistics to TEFL from Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas and is currently studying a PhD on Education with emphasis on ELT in the same university. He is currently working as a full-time professor at the *Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana (ÚNICA)*, where he has taught linguistics, pedagogy, research, and English. His research interests include EFL, linguistics, language identity, and critical discourse analysis.

***Sandra Liliana Rojas Molina** holds a B.A in Philology and Languages from Universidad Nacional de Colombia and a M.A. in Applied Linguistics to the teaching of Languages from Barcelona University. She is currently working as a part-time professor at the *Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana (ÚNICA)*, where she has taught subjects including linguistics, language and society, pedagogy and second language, and communication theory.