Book Review: Grosjean

Bilinguals are not Two Monolinguals in One: Life as a Bilingual: Knowing and Using Two or More Languages

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Abstract

Key tenets of bilingual education involve connectedness in the ability to collaborate with students and colleagues while establishing vital connection to families and communities. This book review examines Francois Grosjean's Life as a bilingual: Knowing and using two or more languages (2021); a compilation of blog posts published from 2010 to 2020. Written from a psycholinguistic perspective, Grosjean highlights many of the advantages of life as a bilingual while denouncing the monolingual view of bilingualism that historically maintains how bilinguals should learn, thrive, and exist in a monolingual English-language world at the expense of their first language. Across fifteen chapters, this collection of blog posts offers an assortment of topical and informative snippets on the bilingual person, adult or child, fitting for any bilingual-curious audience: university professors, researchers, educational practitioners, students, families, and community workers.

Keywords:

bilingualism, blogs, translanguaging, monolingual, complementarity principle

Common denominators exist that help unite us to build strength, summon valor, and enrich our sense of community. One such common denominator is the shared experiences of bilinguals. García-Mateus & Palmer (2017) point out the use of the word language as a verb, "when we language, we are performing a series of social practices and actions that link us to what we want, and who we believe we are" (p. 252). While estimates show that over half of the world's population speaks more than one language or dialect, bilinguals exist among all age and socio-economic groups across the globe (Grosjean, 2021; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). However, in the United States of America, historically one has observed both supportive and opposing viewpoints along with conflicting educational policies that have dehumanized bilingualism. Often this situation has placed educational practitioners along with K-12 students and their families in challenging situations in terms of knowing how to best understand and address the complexity of layers related to language development, second language acquisition, and learning abilities among bilingual populations.

Fortunately, in the book, *Life as a bilingual: Knowing and using two or more languages* (2021) author Francois Grosjean shares 121 of his blog posts from the magazine Psychology Today that address a multitude of bilingual topics published between 2010 and 2020. Each of the fifteen chapters begins with a short introduction and a brief outline of each blog

posts from the magazine *Psychology Today* that address a multitude of bilingual topics published between 2010 and 2020. Each of the fifteen chapters begins with a short introduction and a brief outline of each blog post coupled with abstracts and references. Also included are twenty-three interviews with experts in the field of bilingual scholarship. To help guide the reader, many of the blogs are cross-referenced from one section to the next from blog posts in other chapters.

Grosjean's outstanding contributions to the field of bilingualism now span decades and cover a broad range of interests that include applied linguistics, biculturalism, aphasia, sign language, translanguaging, and language processing in multilingual populations. As well he is a highly regarded academic who has written over a dozen books, countless research articles, and cofounded the highly regarded Cambridge University Press Journal, Bilingualism: Language and Cognition. When first approached with an offer to blog on topics related to bilingualism by the editors of *Psychology* Today, he was initially reluctant. At that time, blog posts appeared as a new but less significant discourse option to share scholarly findings. However, Grosjean quickly realized the potential in spreading his message on bilingualism outside of the world of scholarly journals and extend his readership to a broader audience. In this capacity, his enthusiasm to share his interest in multilingual transdisciplinary work now reaches millions of

of readers. Grosjean's refrain that bilinguals are not two monolinguals in one resonates throughout the book which highlights the specific linguistic configuration that differentiates the bilingual person from monolinguals. This holistic view of bilingualism embraces how bilinguals are not the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals. In actuality, bilinguals represent unique beings specific to cognitive and socio-cultural factors that go beyond the auditory processing and expressive use of more than one language. What comes to mind here is how Grosjean's trademark approach incorporates bilinguals' funds of knowledge or the perspectives, skills, and abilities that bilinguals accumulate based on historical and interactive roles that families, communities, and culture play in their language acquisition and development and cognitive formation (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992).

The reader additionally benefits from two conceptual frameworks associated with Grosjean that inform bilingual phenomena: the language mode and the complementarity principle.

Fundamentally, the language mode is controlled by internal and external factors while reflecting the continuum of a bilingual's use of two languages at different activation states which can then vary from moment-to-moment specific to the context. As well, contingent upon the interlocutor or communicative partner(s), the language mode accounts for intermingling between languages that

frequently occurs in the form of code-switching, code-mixing, and/or translanguaging (see MacSwan, 2022 for extensive coverage on translanguaging). The complementarity principle primarily emphasizes how bilinguals usually acquire and use their languages for different purposes in different contexts throughout the lifespan. This principle accounts for the role of language dominance; one of a bilingual's two languages is usually stronger than the other. However, issues related to dominance and proficiency can shift during one's lifetime. All in all, Grosjean highlights many of the advantages of life as a bilingual while denouncing the monolingual view of bilingualism that historically maintains how bilinguals should learn, thrive, and exist in a monolingual English-language world at the expense of their first language.

After the book's introduction, the first chapter tackles the inherent challenges in how to define and describe bilinguals, an overview of bilingual populations by the numbers, a review of characteristics in those who use two or more languages, an investigation of bilingualism across the life span, and a consideration of bilingualism among school-age children with additional special educational needs. The next section's chapter addresses issues related to emerging and becoming bilingual, a family's role in bilingualism, bilingualism in childhood along with second language learning. The segment that follows covers biculturalism

and personality, dual language emotional and social well-being. Subsequently, the next area centers on neurolinguistic matters such as language processing, the bilingual mind, cognitive advantages of bilingualism, the bilingual brain, and neurological impairment. Following are sections that focus on specialized bilingual professionals: translators, interpreters, teachers, and writers. Finally, in the book's final chapter, the author reflects upon his own life and professional and personal experiences as a person who studies bilingualism.

In sum, this collection of blog posts and interviews integrates theory and practice in an applicable manner that is fitting for students, teachers, professors, researchers, and families or caregivers. Extensive evidence from research-based findings comingles with anecdotal and personal narratives in a way so that any reader can serve as an advocate and better inform those who persist and maintain negative views towards bilingualism. At present, this position is most relevant and now supported in many of the current teacher performance expectations (TPEs) for California public schools. As stated in the California English learner roadmap: Aligning and articulating practices across the system (Olsen, 2021), "The mission of the California English Learner Roadmap policy calls for opportunities to develop proficiency in multiple languages preparing graduates with the linguistic, academic, and social skills and

competencies they require for college, career, and civic participation in a global, diverse, and multilingual world" (page 10). While each chapter in this book contains valuable information worthy of much attention, for purposes of this review, certain selections were made that underscore some of the salient segments relevant to university teacher preparation programs. The aim is then to shed light on these matters that may have a direct impact or even indirect influence on pre-service teachers, educational practitioners, and service providers along with students and their families.

The first chapter, Describing Bilinguals contains nine blog posts. Worth noting in Blog 1.2 is how the monolingual view of bilingualism has resulted in numerous repercussions. One is that bilinguals' language skills historically have been judged based on monolinqual norms. This practice has all too frequently placed undo or unwarranted judgment in that often bilinguals develop a deficit view of their own language skills. For example, the following statements are not uncommon, "I speak English with an accent, and I barely follow proper grammar in my first language" or "I mix my languages all the time" (page 8). Unfortunately, many bilinguals become ashamed of their own first language use while striving to reach English monolingual norms. Grosjean states how "the coexistence and constant interaction of two or more languages have produced a different but

complete language system" (page 9). By stating as much, he shines light on how bilinguals represent an integrated and whole person that cannot be compartmentalized. Overall, bilinguals generally do have a positive view of themselves and take pride in the fact that they can express themselves with more options. Knowing one language helps guide second language learning and can foster open-mindedness while reducing cultural ignorance. In contrast, bilinguals are frequently caught unaware or inconvenienced to act as translators and/or interpreters usually at the request of a monolingual speaker. In Blog 1.5 What a Bilingual's Languages are Used For, one awkward moment is captured in the following exchange, "Antoine, how do you say, 'download a file' in French?" "Hem, I'm not quite sure." "I thought you were bilingual?" (page 14). The complementarity principle explains these inescapable moments when a bilingual person is placed on the spot with limited notice and suddenly asked to use a language that they may not necessarily use within a particular context. Aside from oral language abilities, this holds true with requests for translations or interpretations of written documents or reading material. Knowing another language does not equate being a qualified translator or a productive interpreter contingent upon context, domain, and situations that may require vocabulary or specialized knowledge of syntax, morphology, and even pragmatics.

The five blog posts found in *Chapter* 2: The Extent of Bilingualism call attention to bilingualism in the Unites States. Of importance is to consider the multitude of indigenous languages along with the diverse range of languages and dialects spoken by immigrant and refugee populations encountered in the United States. While challenges persist in terms of gaining census, reports do estimate that approximately 23% of the United States population is bilingual and these numbers are increasingly on the rise (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Monolingual and bilingual people alike are surprised when informed that more than half of the world's population is bilingual or bidialectal. Worth noting, transitional bilingualism has primarily been observed in the US; within one or two generations, bilingual speakers will cease to use their heritage-first minority language and move to embrace the majority dominant language to become primarily monolingual speakers of English (Anderson et al., 2020).

The ten blog posts in *Chapter 3:*Using Two or More Languages focus on bilingual language phenomena that may surface in daily discourse. Discussed in Blog 3.2, a common question is addressed, "What base language is to be used when speaking with others who share the same two languages?" In Blog 3.4, the intermingling of languages is explained; when bilinguals code-switch, the grammatical constraints between their two languages are respected which actually

demonstrates a great degree of communicative competence. Language borrowings (Blog 3.5) are not uncommon to the extent that the colloquial words or phrases are gradually accepted and integrated in everyday use. An example is the word "brunch" from English and integrated into French: "Tu veins brunchar avec nous?/Are you coming to brunch with us?" Examples from English to Spanish include verbs such as lonchar/almorzar: to lunch: parquear/estacionar: to park; and the use of nouns such as la renta/ el alquiler: the rent. As well, the use of cognates between languages can serve as a positive resource as noted in Blog 3.8. Lexical knowledge based on words in one language to another can serve as successful strategies to guide word learning. Words that sound (homophones) and/or written (homographs) similarly can deceive the bilingual mind in the form of "false friends." For instance, the Spanish word librería means bookstore in English where biblioteca is the actual Spanish word for library. Countless examples exist and one must err on the side of caution when speaking or relying on cognates between two languages. Additionally, Blog 3.10 focuses on multimodalities in bilingual populations and the case of American Sign Language (ASL) and spoken language (for more information specific to Spanish-English bilingualism and ASL see Quinto-Pozos (2014)).

The nine blog posts in *Chapter 4:*Across the Life Span discuss how language use can change across the life

span; different people, settings, and situations call for the use or not of a bilinqual's language repertoire (Bialystok et al., 2022). Despite the commonly held view that languages are best acquired at a younger age, new language learning can and does occur later in life. Blogs 4.6 - 4.9 consider how atrophy or language loss, most noted in first language, may occur depending upon age of acquisition, proficiency, and opportunities to use the language (Peña et al., 2021). Together these blogs additionally share research studies that address language recovery via brain imagining (fMRI) studies and even hypnosis.

Chapter 5: Becoming Bilingual consists of a total of eleven blog posts and attends to common themes related to bilingual language acquisition and age. While the majority of bilingual language research has focused on younger children with less attention paid to adolescents and adults, sufficient evidence-based findings now support how bilingualism can be attained at any age (see Blog 5.1). Both Blogs 5.2 and 5.8 underscore how age-specific language developmental milestones are achieved in monolinguals and bilinguals around the same time; key information that teachers and parents need to know and understand (Hulse & Curran, 2020). Frequently shared knowledge appears to support the notion that second language learning has a small window that is best optimized during childhood early school years (Blogs 5.3 - 5.7); however

empirical evidence discussed in this chapter informs a different story.

Chapter 6: Bilingualism in the Family contains ten blog posts that address important questions that families may want to consider when approaching how to raise children in a bilingual household. Explanations are provided that explain the following: how to introduce additional languages to children and what types of support are needed. In the Blog Post 6.2: How Early a Second Language, misconceptions are addressed about age and second language acquisition while arguments confront the critical age to optimize second language learning. Three key elements include: (1) how young children are not necessarily fast and effective language learners; (2) first and second language learning occurs similarly via the same neural structures; and (3) proficiency in second language learners can be significantly influenced by factors that include motivation, time, energy, and language input along with opportunities to practice. While an early start to bilingualism is beneficial, there are no age limits to becoming bilingual. Age restrictions are not to be viewed as a detrimental factor. On the topic of whether or not to raise a child in a bilingual environment, parents play a pivotal role in this department in terms of deciding what languages are to be used in the home and what languages are to be considered for educational and instructional purposes. Important factors that parents should consider is to determine how much

language input and output are needed in order to learn, develop, acquire, and maintain each language. Blog 6.4 addresses how some families integrate the "one-person-one-language" approach to bilingualism with their children; a strategy with noted advantages as well as several inconveniences. On this matter, each parent will only use their preferred or first language with their child; Parent A might speak only Spanish in the household with the child while Parent B will exclusively use English. On a similar note, Blog 6.5 Parental Language Input and Childhood Bilingualism relays how imperative it is for children who are brought up in a two-language household to receive as much input and output in the minority language as the majority language.

As is the case, English as the majority language will often take over as the dominant language. Several blogs in this chapter discuss and explain these phenomena and the evolutionary nature of this relationship over time. Worth mentioning, parents repeatedly express fear that the next or future generation(s) is(are) losing not only the family's heritage language but culture as well (see Blogs 6.6 - 6.8 for more details on this matter). Language use becomes an important component in the dyad between parents and their children. Children might tell their parents, "I do not want to speak that (home or first) language." On the flip side, many parents feel the need to sacrifice their heritage language so that their child can acculturate or assimilate into

the dominant culture and majority language to ensure a better life. For decades, educators and administrators alike have shared responsibility in promoting the false belief that emerging bilingual students or English-language learners (ELLs) with developmental language disorders were best served in English-only classrooms (Bird et al., 2016; Paradis, & Govindarajan, 2018). The junction of bilingualism and special education is the focus of Chapter 7: Children with Additional Needs. During parent conferences and Individualized Educational Program meetings, teachers and administration have consistently dissuaded parents and caregivers of bilingual children with language-based developmental disorders to learn how to speak, learn, maintain their first or home language. This stance even earned state-level legislative support as in Proposition 227 in California (1998) and Arizona's Proposition 203 (2000) where English-only instruction was institutionalized (Gonzalez et al., 2021). However, such claims fail to acknowledge a significant body of research and evidence-based-findings that support how bilinguals with developmental language disorders, specific learning disabilities, dyslexia, autism, and hearing loss can learn and thrive in two languages (Peña et al., 2021; Quinto-Pozos, 2014).

As well, of importance is to better understand how language differences that bilinguals exhibit between their two languages have all too often been misinterpreted as a language disorder or

learning disabilities. Nowhere is this more evident in the over-representation of English-learners in special education or other remedial programs (Hulse & Curran, 2020; Turkan, 2020). The author clearly expresses the many reasons as to why educators should not compare and hold bilinguals accountable to monolingual standards. First, over-identification is a result of not testing a student in both of their two languages as well as the lack of knowledge related to typical linguistic developmental milestones in each of language of a bilingual. Secondly, under-identification takes place under similar circumstances when a student is left in the wait and see period with the idea that they will eventually catch up. However, often is the case that the student does present with a learning disability and therefore misses out on valuable additional support and specialized instructional intervention. All too often, these scenarios have played themselves out in schools based on false beliefs and misdirected guidance towards bilingualism. Over the last two decades, an abundance of available research and experimental studies now support how bilingual and biliterate students experience not only academic benefits, but cognitive gains evidenced throughout one's lifespan (Anderson et al., 2022; Bialystok et al., 2022). The nine blogs located in Chapter 8: Second Lan*guage Learning* address topics related to students who begin to learn a second language upon entering school. Blog 8.2 contains an interview with Dr. Fabrice

Jaumont, author of *The bilingual revolu*tion (2017), which describes how parent groups advocated for the right to educate their children in bilingual classrooms in New York. As a result, educational policy makers have listened and now many support the additional economic, cultural, and sociopolitical benefits of biliterate populations. On this matter, California voters in 2016 overwhelmingly passed Proposition 58, which placed an educational priority on multilingual learning in K-12 schools resulting in the immediate need for a dramatic increase in the number of dual language university teacher preparation programs. From this victory came Global California 2030, an initiative that contained multiple large-scale ambitious goals. One aim in particular was to quadruple the number of school-based dual language immersion programs from 400 in 2017 to 1,600 by 2030. This policy shift has large implications for the 22.3% of California's school population classified as dual language learners (DLLs) and this percentage increases to 60% of children in the under the age of five category (Gonzalez et al., 2021). On this matter, Blog 8.2 What is Translanguaging? includes an interview with Dr. Ofelia García, one of the most visible proponents of translanguaging; which legitimizes fluid language practices as a pedagogical framework that fosters the use of languages in school as they are used in children's homes and communities. Highlighted is one eleven-year-old student's comment, "Spanish runs through my heart, but English rules my veins" (page

174). This quote fittingly captures how a bilingual person's two-language systems are complex and dynamic systems that cannot be separated (García & Kleifgen, 2020).

The eight blogs found in *Chapter* 11: Language Processing cover issues related to bilingual language perception and processing which represent complex systems that operate in different activation states. Blog 11.1 When Bilinguals Speak draws attention to Grosjean's conceptual framework of the language mode, which frames how bilinguals navigate along a continuum with two endpoints. One is the monolingual language mode where only one language is fully active and a bilingual language mode where several languages can be activated. Of importance is how the state of activation among bilinguals will fluctuate contingent upon various given points from moment to moment specific to internal and external factors that influence what language or languages are needed. Blog 11.4 Does Processing Language Differently Mean More Efficiently? further highlights how the coexistence and constant interaction of two languages in bilinguals creates specific processing characteristics. Certainly, the use of brain imaging has helped our understanding of how bilinguals process language differently than monolinguals, most noted in between-language competition and within-language competition (page 242). Blog 11.8 brings up important diagnostic issues based on

an interview with speech-language pathologist and researcher, Dr. Lu-Feng Shi as related to specific tasks to consider when assessing bilinguals' language perception and comprehension skills.

The eight blog posts found in Chapter 12: The Bilingual Mind report on a range of matters such as the bilingual mind and dreaming (Blog 12.1), the retention of autobiographical memory (Blog 12.3) and approaches to mathematical operations and numeric calculations (Blog 12.4). Of significance is the much-discussed recent issue concerning the bilingual advantage. As noted in this chapter, select research findings now inform how bilingualism appears to strengthen certain cognitive processes and executive functioning that "makes the bilingual brain more resistant to neurodegeneration" (page 254). Two blog posts in this section discuss a range of studies that support these claims based on findings that surfaced during certain language processing tasks that involved speech perception, allocation of memory, and categorization tasks. On the other hand, the last two blogs (12.8 & 12.9) impart views that counter these claims. Of importance is the discussion generated here that shares current and contrasting research that yields one conclusion: the need to continue and maintain a healthy debate about the cognitive and linguistics consequences of bilingualism.

Chapter 13: The Bilingual Brain consists of six blogs; the first three posts, each with a distinct focus, cover neuroimaging technique studies. Blog 13.1 views a range of individual differences among bilinguals in terms of their neural networks of different language pairs such as English and Chinese, and how language components are processed differently between our left and right brain hemispheres. Blogs 13.2 and 13.3 review and share results of brain imaging studies that compare and contrast monolinguals with bilinguals. That last four blogs address a range of distinctive issues related to diagnosis, treatment, and recovery of multilingual patients with aphasia; an acquired language impairment which is usually the result of a stroke or brain injury. Aphasia affects a person's ability to express and understand written and spoken language. As bilingual populations are diverse in so many ways, one can anticipate that bilingual aphasic patients have demonstrated a range of recovery patterns in language use that is well explained in Blog 13.5: *Impairment and Recovery* Patterns in Multilingual Aphasic Patients. Of note, explanations are summarized and supported primarily by case studies specific to parallel recovery of both languages, selective recovery during which the patient never regains one or more languages, and differential impairment and recovery where the languages are differently impaired at the time of injury and are then restored at the same time or at different rates. The

The presence of multilingual students who learn or use English as an additional language in general and special education classrooms has gained attention in relation to equitable education opportunities they received during the pandemic (Turkan, 2020). Longstanding matters related to the digital divide were made even more visible and impacted many already marginalized students as a result of COVID-related school closures. Educational practitioners, not only in K-12 classrooms but in higher educational settings, need to find ways to defeat divisiveness. The pandemic will most likely continue to impact the dynamics of educational interactions both in and outside of the classroom. This includes developing social and emotional connections remotely behind the screen, and in-person during class discussions, responding to equity and accessibility issues, while engaging in reflective practices and self-assessment of connecting language and culture. Moving forward, of importance is to engage students in real time and humanize teacher-student connectivity. As a valuable resource suitable for our current post-pandemic times, this book delivers a powerful message in regard to life as a bilingual that fortifies the abundant advantages and unique consequences experienced by speakers of more than one language.

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