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Edited by
Miles Turnbull and
Jennifer Dailey-O'Cain

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.
First Language Use in Second and Foreign Language Learning/
Edited by Miles Turnbull and Jennifer Dailey-O'Cain.
Second Language Acquisition: 44.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Language and languages--Study and teaching. 2. Second language acquisition--Study and teaching. 3. Second language acquisition research. 4. Discourse analysis.
I. Turnbull, Miles. II. Dailey-O'Cain, Jennifer.
P53.F53 2009
418.0071–dc22 2009026141

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN-13: 978-1-84769-196-5 (hbk)
ISBN-13: 978-1-84769-195-8 (pbk)

Multilingual Matters
UK: St Nicholas House, 31–34 High Street, Bristol BS1 2AW, UK.
USA: UTP, 2250 Military Road, Tonawanda, NY 14150, USA.
Canada: UTP, 5201 Dufferin Street, North York, Ontario M3H 5T8, Canada.

Typeset by Techset Composition Ltd., Salisbury, UK.
Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Group.

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Acknowledgements

The editors would like to thank Glenn Levine for giving many of the authors in this book the opportunity to gather and explore this topic at a fruitful workshop in February 2007 in Irvine, California. We would also like to thank Barbara Rohde for the book's cover art, and Rebecca Hatch, Aaron King, Frank Orlando, Brittany Perry and David Rohde for assistance in staging it.

Contributors

Carl Blyth is the Director of the Texas Language Technology Center and Associate Professor of French Linguistics in the Department of French and Italian at the University of Texas at Austin. His most recent publications include *Teaching French Grammar in Context* (Yale University Press, 2007, co-author) and *Pause-café: French in Review* (McGraw-Hill, 2009, co-author). He also serves as the Series Editor of the annual volume *Issues in Language Program Direction* (Heinle).

Jennifer Dailey-O'Cain is an Associate Professor of German applied linguistics at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada. Alongside her work on codeswitching in the classroom, her research also includes work in language, migration and identity in both Germany and German-speaking Canada, and language attitudes in post-unification Germany. Major recent publications include articles in the *Modern Language Journal*, the *International Journal of Bilingualism*, the *Canadian Modern Language Review* and the *Zeitschrift für angewandte Linguistik.*

Michael Evans is Deputy Head of the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. He is co-director of a DCSF-funded study, 'Language Learning at KS3: the impact of the KS3 Modern Foreign Languages Framework and changes to the curriculum on provision and practice' (2006–2008). Recent books include (as editor) *Foreign Language Learning with Digital Technology* (Continuum, 2009) and (as co-author) *Foreign Languages: Teaching School Subjects 11–19* (RoutledgeFalmer, 2007).

Janet M. Fuller is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. She has done research on Pennsylvania German, discourse markers, and the courtesy title 'Ms'. Her current research focuses on pre-teen bilinguals in the classroom, based on fieldwork among Spanish-English bilinguals in southern Illinois and English-German bilinguals in Berlin, Germany. Her interests include codeswitching, identity, language ideology and gender.

Glenn S. Levine (PhD University of Texas at Austin) is Associate Professor of German at the University of California, Irvine. His areas of research include second-language acquisition and socialization, and curriculum design and teaching. His publications deal with code choice in second-language learning, constructivist, ecological, and critical approaches to curriculum design and teaching and issues of language program direction.

Grit Liebscher is an Associate Professor of German at the University of Waterloo in Canada, and she is a sociolinguist with a focus on interactional sociolinguistics and conversation analysis. Her research interests include language use among German-Canadians and language and migration in post-unification Germany. Major recent publications include several book chapters as well as articles in the *Modern Language Journal*, the *International Journal of Bilingualism*, the *Canadian Modern Language Review* and the *Zeitschrift für angewandte Linguistik*. She has also co-edited (with a team of scholars from the University of Waterloo) a book on Germans in the North American diaspora.

Ernesto Macaro is Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Oxford where he teaches on the Masters in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition and on the postgraduate language teacher education programme (PGCE). He has carried out research and published widely on the topics of codeswitching in second language classrooms and on language learner strategies. He has published in venues such as *Modern Language Journal, Applied Linguistics and Language Learning.*

Brian McMillan holds a MEd from the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada. He has taught both French and English in a variety of contexts in Canada and in Japan. His research interests include L1 use in L2 teaching and learning, Vygotskian sociocultural theory, teacher training and learner autonomy. Brian is currently teaching English and working on research into student and teacher use of the TL and L1 at Hiroshima Bunkyo Women's University and at Kanda University of International Studies in Chiba, Japan.

Krisztina Nagy was trained as a Primary School Teacher in her native Hungary and taught there for five years. Then, she trained in London to use the Montessori Method and taught for three years in a Montessori school. Subsequently she did a course in Scotland on teaching children with learning difficulties, and worked as a Learning Support Teacher. She completed an MA at Stirling University on Teaching English as a Foreign Language and is about to defend her doctoral dissertation (Stirling) upon which the chapter in this volume is based. Krisztina has presented papers

at various conferences on language learning in primary schools. Her creative spirit is expressed in her use of new, interesting materials for carrying out research.

Kim Potowski is Associate Professor of Hispanic linguistics at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her research focuses on Spanish in the United States, including a book about a dual immersion school and recent studies about discourse markers, Spanish use in *quinceañeras*, and 'MexiRican' ethnolinguistic identity. She directs the Heritage Language Cooperative, which promotes research and teacher development. Her 2009 book *Language Diveristy in the U.S.* (Cambridge University Press) profiles non-English languages spoken in the United States.

Daniel Robertson has taught EFL and applied linguistics in Italy, Germany and the UK. His PhD (University of Edinburgh, 1991) is concerned with the acquisition of English by L1 German learners of English. Since completing his PhD he has held research and teaching positions at the universities of Edinburgh, Leicester and Stirling. His research interests include generative approaches to second language acquisition, classroom discourse and the cultural contexts of ELT.

Miles Turnbull is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island. He is Coordinator of Graduate Programs and works in the pre-service program in French second language teaching, as Coordinator of the Bachelor of Education-French Education. Miles' research has been funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Canadian Heritage, The Education and Quality Assurance Office of Ontario, and the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers. In 2006, Miles was named research scholar in residence in official languages funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Department of Canadian Heritage. Miles is currently Past-President of the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers.

Introduction

MILES TURNBULL and JENNIFER DAILEY-O'CAIN

In recent years, the debate over target language and first language use in teaching and learning second and foreign languages has resulted in an extensive body of literature. Despite this surge in interest for this topic in the past 10 to 15 years, however, no single book, edited volume, or special issue of a journal has been published within that time period to unify what is known about this topic. Moreover, a majority of studies and articles relating to this topic have examined the issues from either a pedagogical perspective or from a sociolinguistic one; few have combined both perspectives. Consequently, the overall goal of this edited volume is to do just that. Drawing on sociolinguistic, pedagogical and critical theories, this volume offers new and fresh perspectives on an age-old and controversial issue in applied linguistics and language teaching by focusing on the use of the first language in communicative or immersion-type classrooms, situations where first language use is generally expected to be rare or nonexistent. Through this focus, the volume as a whole demands a reconceptualization of codeswitching as something which is natural for bilinguals to do – and not just proficient ones, but also aspiring ones – and classroom codeswitching as being inherently linked with bilingual codeswitching. Although the chapters in this volume explicitly explore these links to greater and lesser degrees, all of them cast the second-language learner in the communicative or the immersion classroom as a developing bilingual (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993) rather than as a poor imitator of the monolingual native speaker, and by doing so, imply that selective and principled codeswitching in the second and foreign language classrooms can be seen as a reflection of what bi- and multilingual speakers do in everyday life.

While all authors fit within this core framework, the volume nonetheless presents contrasting views, both in terms of the amount of first language use that should be allowed and in terms of the communicative and pedagogical reasons for teacher and learner codeswitching. These contrasting views are not surprising, given that the authors come from

many different backgrounds and methodological traditions. We also anticipate that at least parts of the volume will be controversial for some readers. We expect, accept and encourage this controversy, since we believe that the resulting debate has the potential to lead to even further stimulating work. We therefore offer this volume up not as a definitive 'one true answer' to put a halt to this discussion once and for all, but as a state-of-the-art overview of where research in the field currently stands, and as a jumping-off point for further conversation and inquiry.

Finally, we would also like to stress very clearly up front that we do not equate the use of the first language in the second or foreign language classroom with passing out a license to overuse of the first language, that is, to become so dependent on the first language that teachers and learners cannot function in a second or foreign language classroom without it. Whatever benefits first language use may bring, it is clear that the ultimate goal of a second or foreign language classroom remains the learning of the target language; practices that undermine this ultimate goal must be avoided.

So Why the Controversy?

It is perhaps unavoidable that many second and foreign-language educators and researchers have developed strong beliefs about the most effective way to master a language – beliefs that are not always grounded in theory or research. In some cases, official policies in certain language learning contexts that officially ban first language use by teachers and students may be the source of some of these strongly held beliefs. In other cases, beliefs that educated speakers, native speakers and advanced bilinguals do not and should not switch back and forth from one language to another may be the source. Many educators also believe that avoiding interference from the learner's first language is necessary in effective language teaching and learning, and these educators may believe that avoiding codeswitching is the only way to ensure that the learner's first language does not interfere with target-language development. For many second and foreign-language educators, any notion of first language use in language teaching and learning connotes the dreaded grammar-translation methods that communicative language proponents loathe – after all, unless it is compensated by further target-language talk, codeswitching reduces exposure to that all-important comprehensible input in the target language (Krashen, 1982). As this argument goes, codeswitching also detracts from opportunities for negotiating meaning while interacting with other learners or native speakers in the target language.

Target-language immersion programs may have also played a significant role in promoting exclusive target language use in second and foreign language teaching (McMillan & Turnbull, this volume). These programs, which originated in Canada, are cited by some as the most successful language programs ever (Krashen, 1984; Obadia, 1996), and a core principle of them is exclusive target language use. Due to the success of immersion programs in producing functionally bilingual graduates, we believe that many educators around the world cite this success as rationale to support exclusive target language use by teachers and students in second and foreign language teaching. Moreover, many curriculum developers and leaders in immersion education are rarely open to entertaining any discussion of codeswitching in these programs.

The Virtual Position and the Maximal Position

As Macaro (2005) points out, there is a continuum of perspectives on target language and first language use. On one extreme, there is the position of exclusive use of the target language, which Macaro refers to as the virtual position. Proponents of the virtual position see no pedagogical or communicative value in the first language at all. These proponents draw on the L1 = L2 learning hypothesis (Ellis, 1986; Krashen, 1981); they argue that since the first language is the only language present during L1 acquisition, the second or target language should be the only language present or available when a second or additional language is acquired. Proponents of a virtual position also draw on Krashen's popular comprehensible input hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) which argues for exposing learners to a flood of comprehensible target-language input to ensure mastery of the target language. Further theoretical rationale for exclusive target language use is drawn from Swain's output hypothesis (Swain, 1985). This hypothesis recognizes the importance of comprehensible input for language learning, but argues that comprehensible input alone will not ensure mastery of the target language. Because Swain argues that learners need to speak and write in the target language in order to master it, proponents of extreme versions of the virtual position on target language use may argue that this speaking and writing must always and only be in the target language.

The virtual position's proponents may also cite studies that have shown that the amount of target language input does affect learners' target-language development (e.g. Larsen-Freeman, 1985; Lightbown, 1991; Liu, 2008; Turnbull, 2001). For example, Carroll (1975) and others (e.g. Burstall *et al.*, 1974; Wolf, 1977) have established a direct and positive correlation between learner achievement and teacher use of the target language.