Introduction: The Multilingual Prism

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Each year the TESOL & Applied Linguistics programs invite internationally-renowned researchers to give lectures at Teachers College. This year, we had the pleasure of hosting Dr. Jasone Cenoz and Dr. Durk Gorter, two prominent scholars in the field of multilingualism. In their talk, Cenoz and Gorter re-evaluated the previously dominant understanding of multilingualism and proposed a new approach to investigating multilingualism, which they termed *Focus on Multilingualism* (henceforth, FOM). While earlier treatments of multilingualism ignored dynamic interactions between the different linguistic systems that multilinguals know, this new perspective stresses the importance of a holistic approach to understanding multilingual speakers and their linguistic repertoires. Stemming from this new definition, multilingualism may be examined as a social and an individual phenomenon, keeping in mind, however, that "individual and societal multilingualism are not completely separated" (Cenoz, 2013, p. 5).

At the level of the individual, by expanding the notion of Cook's (2002) *multicompetence* (i.e., the compound state of a mind with two grammars), Cenoz and Gorter (2011) suggest that the minds of multilingual speakers are essentially quite different from those of monolingual speakers and that "a bilingual or multilingual person's communicative competence is not comparable to that of a monolingual" (p. 340). Specifically, knowledge and use of more than one language can affect cognition in general, thus granting multilingual speakers greater metalinguistic awareness, or even, for instance, aid in the delayed onset of Alzheimer's disease (e.g., Bialystok, 2011). From a psycholinguistic angle, the interplay of several repertoires in a multilingual mind may also imply different ways of perceiving reality "beyond what the first language represents" (Bassetti & Cook, 2011, p. 143).

At the sociolinguistic level, research into multilingualism has focused on educational contexts and linguistic landscapes (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006), among other issues. Cenoz and Gorter (2011), propose that their FOM approach could be applied to investigate and understand multilingualism in school settings. Here, the goal for multilingual speakers should not be seen as imitating educated native speakers, "but rather be seen as possessing unique forms of competence, or competencies, in their own right" (p. 340). In addition, while code-switching and the use of learners' first languages is usually banned in traditional language classrooms, such practices should not be considered negatively; using multiple languages simultaneously is the norm in multilingual communities, and these practices could serve as tools to promote the development of additional languages Finally, Cenoz and Gorter point out that using a holistic approach to understanding learners' total linguistic repertoires would provide a bigger picture to explore the ways in which learners process and develop their multiple language skills.

The contributions to this forum address issues related to Cenoz and Gorter's FOM approach as well as various aspects of multilingualism from the individual and social domains. In addition, several contributors take a macroscopic view of the FOM approach in relation to current SLA theories and research approaches. Regarding the latter, Adrienne Wai Man Lew analyzes FOM in relation to second language acquisition (SLA) at both theoretical and methodological levels, pointing out that while this new approach to multilingualism appears to have the potential to fill certain gaps in the existing body of SLA theory and research, it

unavoidably also has its limitations. In a similar vein, although acknowledging the benefits of the multilingual holistic approach, Timothy Hall proposes that the validity of FOM would be bolstered if stronger links to current SLA theories were made, especially from the usage-based perspective. Farah Akbar and Chen-ling Alice Chen also take on the principles of FOM in relation to SLA research, specifically with regards to the issue of monolingual bias. Both suggest that monolingual bias should be avoided in SLA research, and the holistic approach put forth by FOM should be adopted when investigating learners' linguistic repertoires.

In discussing multilingualism from the sociolinguistic perspective, Sarah Sok suggests the applicability of the FOM approach to studies on heritage language learners. Mi Sun Park explores the definitions of *code-switching* and *translanguaging* in the current literature and further suggests their potential functions in multilingual school contexts. Charles Combs presents the possible role of code-switching in language development in classrooms. He argues that code-switching could serve as a platform for instructed language learning.

By focusing on the individual level of multilingualism, EunYoung Kang, Ji-Yung Jung and Natalia Sáez examine multicompetence from different perspectives. EunYoung Kang discusses the linguistic capacities of multilinguals in relation to attainable goals of multilingual education. Turning to a specific dimension of multicompetence, Ji-Yung Jung focuses on the critical role of metalinguistic awareness in acquiring multiple languages. She also mentions suggestions for future research on metalinguistic awareness and multilingual acquisition. Natalia Sáez discusses multicompetence specifically in relation to the dynamics of conceptual representations and restructurings that may occur in multilingual minds. She examines how the knowledge and use of multiple languages could influence the way experience is perceived by multilingual individuals.

The commentaries included here are reflections sparked by this exciting new trend of analyses into the educational, socio-political and cognitive dynamics involved in the acquisition and use of multiple languages. The discussions generated in this forum will, we hope, contribute to a more unified understanding and examination of the theoretical and empirical efforts put forth by SLA research in relation to the new holistic approach to multilingualism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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COMMENTARIES