*Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* (2022), **42**, 18–24
doi:10.1017/S0267190521000106

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Enseñando *en español*: The need to support dual language bilingual education teachers' pedagogical language knowledge

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**Abstract**

Dual language bilingual education (DLBE) teachers, depending on the modality of the program, teach content areas (i.e., language arts, science, math, social studies) in a language other than English (LOTE) and English. DLBE teachers, who teach in Spanish, should be supported by school districts in meaningful ways. These districts should be equipped to provide the necessary academic and professional development for the DLBE teachers. This paper explores the increasing need to support DLBE teachers' metalinguistic awareness as well as pedagogical language knowledge (see Bunch, 2013) in Spanish. Guided by Charmaz' (2006) constructivist grounded theory, this paper analyzed ten transcribed audio interviews with a single DLBE teacher. Interview data included video-taped classroom observations (i.e., preplanning and postlesson implementation), robust field memos, and student artifacts. Data analysis suggested the need for further clarification as far as the teacher's own *pedagogical language knowledge* (PLK; Bunch, 2013) in Spanish. However, data also indicated that this particular educator was able to negotiate the linguistic and content demands of teaching language arts in Spanish by seeking multifaceted resources and using the full extent of her linguistic repertoire.

**Abstracto**

Los maestros hispanohablantes que enseñan en programas bilingües de inmersión recíproca dentro del contexto de los Estados Unidos deberían recibir capacitación profesional de sus distritos escolares de una manera eficaz y efectiva. Por lo tanto, los distritos escolares deberían de poseer los recursos necesarios para administrar este tipo de capacitación. Este estudio de investigación explora la necesidad de capacitar y afianzar la conciencia metalingüística y el conocimiento pedagógico y lingüístico de maestros hispanohablantes que enseñan en programas bilingües de inmersión recíproca (ver Bunch, 2013). Este estudio de investigación basado en la teoría fundamentada constructivista (Charmaz, 2006) analizó y transcribió diez entrevistas con una sola maestra. Entre los datos de investigación también se incluyen observaciones de enseñanza filmadas (ej., planeamiento e implementación de la lección), notas de estudio de campo y artefactos creados por los alumnos. El análisis de estos datos indicó que la maestra necesitaba más capacitación y afianzamiento de su *conocimiento pedagógico y lingüístico* cuando enseñaba en español (Bunch, 2013). Sin embargo, el análisis también demostró que ella

era capaz de afrontar las demandas académicas y lingüísticas dentro del contexto de la clase de lenguaje, dictada en español, y pudo usar todos sus recursos (ej., lingüísticos y académicos) para afianzar su pedagogía.

**Keywords:** Spanish; language arts; dual language bilingual education; metalinguistic awareness

DLBE programs integrate students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in multilingual classrooms that promote and foster dynamic and equitable learning environments (de Jong & Howard, 2009). DLBE programs aim to achieve high levels of bilingualism and biliteracy, grade-level academic achievement, and positive cross-cultural attitudes (Christian, 1996; Lindholm-Leary, 2001). Students in DLBE programs receive instruction (e.g., math, social studies, science, and language arts) in the LOTE and in English.[1] While these programs are in high demand across the nation (Mercuri, 2015), teacher preparation programs specifically tailored to educate highly qualified DLBE teachers have not been able to meet the ongoing national need. According to Gibney et al. (2021), more than 50% of the states in the United States are in need of qualified bilingual educators. To fill these critical vacancies, school districts featuring DLBE programs are identifying potential teacher candidates with an array of linguistic, cultural, and academic backgrounds; however, they have not always gone through a teacher preparation program tailored to prepare DLBE educators. For example, former foreign language and content area teachers are now making the arduous transition to become DLBE classroom educators (de Jong & Barko-Alva, 2015). As these teachers learn to teach in DLBE contexts, school districts should be equipped to provide the academic and professional support these teachers need to be successful, particularly while teaching content in Spanish. This paper explores the increasing need to support DLBE teachers' Spanish metalinguistic awareness (i.e., in-depth understanding of language) as well as their pedagogical language knowledge (see Bunch, 2013) in Spanish. Supporting DLBE teachers who can actively counteract monolingual orientations is a labor of equity and inclusion. Administering such support requires leadership at the school and district levels to re-envision their professional, academic, cultural, and linguistic structures of support and professional development. This research article explores how a DLBE teacher makes sense of teaching language arts taught in Spanish within the context of a DLBE program.

## Developing DLBE Teachers' Pedagogical Language Knowledge in Spanish

Guerrero (1997) and Guerrero and Guerrero (2017) have discussed the need to support the development of pedagogical Spanish proficiency and language skills for teachers who are seeking to teach and learn in DLBE classroom settings. While standardized testing has been established to "ensure" that bilingual teachers demonstrate high levels of Spanish proficiency in their DLBE classrooms, standardized testing often fails to offer a holistic picture of what teachers should know about language and content when scaffolding instruction in DLBE settings (Guerrero, 1997; Stansfield & Kenyon, 1991). Pervasive monolingual orientations in PK–12 schools (see Palmer, 2011; Zúñiga et al., 2018) coupled with limited access to quality DLBE programs have prevented Spanish speakers, in the United States (see Aquino-Sterling, 2016; Flores, 2005), from improving their own Spanish pedagogical language knowledge in order to become bilingual educators.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190521000106 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Guerrero and Guerrero (2017) analyzed students' (i.e., preservice teachers) perspectives on understanding Spanish for teaching purposes. In this study, the participating preservice teachers stressed the importance of scaffolding their own Spanish proficiency to provide appropriate instruction in bilingual settings. In addition, the students identified limited opportunities to actively engage in the use of Spanish for teaching purposes. Despite these restrictions, multilingual speakers seeking to become bilingual teachers have strived to use their sociocultural and academic resources to maintain their home language (i.e., Spanish; Guerrero, 1997) and create a powerful counternarrative to foster and promote their linguistic and cultural resources. Nonetheless, as they continue to work in the classroom, DLBE teachers need academic and professional support to build their linguistic capacity to teach in Spanish. According to Bunch (2013), "the pedagogical language knowledge (PLK) of mainstream teachers can be constructed as knowledge of language directly related to disciplinary teaching and learning situated in a particular (and multiple) context in which teaching and learning take place" (307). Using Bunch's concept of PLK, I argue that DLBE teachers teaching in Spanish should be afforded multiple opportunities to analyze and reflect on how they use language to increase their own metalinguistic awareness. In addition, they should be provided with learning and teaching spaces wherein they are able to develop their pedagogical Spanish proficiency skills to construct meaningful learning opportunities where students use and explore all their linguistic resources and affirm their identities. The following section provides a description of the methodology utilized in this study.

## Methods

This qualitative research study seeks to explore how a DLBE teacher makes sense of teaching Spanish language arts within the context of a DLBE program. For the purpose of this paper, a section of the data analyzed in a larger study was used. This study took place in a fifth-grade DLBE classroom in Florida. Sueños Elementary School (a pseudonym) is a K–5 elementary school with 740 students schoolwide, and 70% of the student population receives free and/or reduced lunch. In the United States, students who fall into this category are classified as students in need of financial support. Sonia (also a pseudonym) was the DLBE teacher at Sueños ES with five years of teaching experience, teaching all content areas across both languages. Sonia taught 50% of the instructional time in Spanish and 50% of the instructional time in English. Guided by Charmaz' (2006) constructivist grounded theory, I conducted ten semistructured interviews (Bernard, 1988) with Sonia, which were then transcribed and analyzed. The semistructured teacher interviews (Bernard, 1988) were divided into two sections:

- *Preunit planning interviews:* These interviews were conducted and recorded as the teacher planned for her lesson.
- *Postunit implementation interviews:* These interviews were conducted and recorded after the teacher had implemented her lesson. Videotaped observations of the instructional units being implemented were used as prompts for the postunit implementation interviews.

Data connections were drawn between initial codes among the data seeking to establish core categories and common themes in efforts to construct a theory (i.e., theoretical coding). Memo writing (Charmaz, 2006) was conducted throughout the analysis process, allowing for an in-depth analysis of the data and the codes. Data also included

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190521000106 Published online by Cambridge University Press

robust field memos and student artifacts. In terms of my own positionality, data memos and reflection allowed me to engage in the research project using my own context as a framework—a former emergent bilingual high school student and ESL high school instructor. As the researcher, I was able to initially establish rapport with the participant by conducting an external project (i.e., providing professional development for teachers in the DLBE program in my capacity as a research assistant). Once my own research study took place, Sonia and I developed a relationship of trust and collaboration. My role in the classroom was that of a participant-observer (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002), and I was able to acquire an in-depth understanding of the participants' instructional activities as she engaged with her students.

## Findings

Data analysis indicated the crucial need to support DLBE teachers in scaffolding their own pedagogical language knowledge (see Bunch, 2013; Guerrero & Guerrero, 2017). Nonetheless, in her search for culturally and linguistic responsive instructional resources, this teacher was able to negotiate the linguistic and content demands of teaching language arts in Spanish. Sonia often felt as though planning for language arts instruction in Spanish required her to (a) fully understand abstract academic concepts (i.e., author's mood and tone) and (b) negotiate the discipline-specific Spanish needed to teach *la clase de lenguaje* (language arts class). The following exchange illustrated Sonia's attempts to meaningfully address the instruction of *el tono y la voz* (mood and tone) to meet the unit's learning outcomes.

**Sonia:** We are really going to focus on the mood and tone of the text. I don't know, I think I am going to tell them, or I might just give them three options, you know. We say, "Can we conclude that Elena is showing courage?" "Could we conclude that Elena is?" It would be something like el, el, el [the, the, the] "Yo creo que el ambiente es de valentía porque tatatata" [I think the setting is bravery because blah, blah, blah]

**Researcher:** El ambiente [the setting] is like the setting?

**Sonia:** Well, I use it; it's more like mood?

**Researcher:** Because tone is tono. El tono de la historia [The tone of the story] then you would need to find the language for mood, right? And you would need to scaffold for that?

**Sonia:** Yeah, I try not to confuse them because you can use ambiente for setting and then for setting I also saw [the book publisher] uses el escenario también [scenario as well]

**Researcher:** But I think mood has a specific term?

**Sonia:** Is it imaginario [imaginary]? ¿Estado de ánimo? [state of well-being].

In the example above, Sonia's challenge was to identify the term used for mood (i.e., within the context of language arts taught in Spanish), or *la voz* (voice), which prompted her to de-emphasize the focus of the lesson. Sonia was using words such as, *el ambiente* (i.e., setting), *imaginario* (i.e., imaginary), and *el estado de ánimo* (i.e., state of well-being); these words are direct translations for mood. However, using any of these terms to potentially conduct research and/or identify resources to increase her conceptual and linguistic understanding failed to support Sonia's lesson

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190521000106 Published online by Cambridge University Press

planning. Nonetheless, it is crucial to point out that Sonia was using all her linguistic resources to make sense of the concept she was attempting to teach in Spanish. While watching the videotaped unit observation, Sonia described the concepts students seemed to have understood (i.e., the tone) and the concepts where they needed additional support (i.e., the mood), and she wondered "The tone, they got very well from the story. The mood from the story—we really didn't analyze the author's words in depth, so that's something we really still need to work on." Sonia's realization indicated that her students needed more scaffolding to understand the concept of *la voz* (mood). According to the data, not having access to the linguistic support needed when addressing specific concepts in Spanish often resulted in misfocused and limited instruction due to the need for further clarification.

Sonia was able to identify the need to expand her own pedagogical language knowledge in Spanish. Doing so may enable her to better address certain concepts, including mood and tone. The following quotation indicated how Sonia sought out professional support to ensure meaningful instruction in Spanish:

> I have to research it…you know I go [to] one [term or concept] and I just find as much as I can so that…you know the kids don't miss out because they have to learn it…you know…umm or it's just speaking to another colleague that might have a little bit more knowledge and…you know just get that clear understanding.

In DLBE programs, the additional work that teachers face as they teach concepts in Spanish and/or LOTE (language other than English) often goes unnoticed. While "speaking to another colleague" could be a feasible option, these opportunities are not always easily facilitated. To seek out the professional support from another colleague, Sonia would have to account for time outside teaching hours, materials, and resources, thus adding to her contractual work hours. The following sections provide a discussion of findings and implications to support DLBE teachers teaching in the LOTE (i.e., Spanish).

## Discussion

While Sonia is a dedicated educator who brings knowledge, leadership, and advocacy to the classroom, she was in dire need of professional support to expand upon and scaffold her PLK (Bunch, 2013) in Spanish. As Sonia worked tirelessly to plan for meaningful and engaging language arts lessons taught in Spanish, one of her main concerns was identifying the discipline-specific vocabulary. It could be argued that if Sonia was able to easily access professional structures of support, then she would have been able to not only identify discipline-specific vocabulary in Spanish but also utilize her planning time in more effective ways, such as developing significant content and linguistic understanding to support multilingual students.

Despite the limitations, Sonia worked with determination to increase her knowledge and language base in Spanish and identify accessible resources in Spanish. Limited teacher support to increase discipline-specific pedagogical language knowledge in Spanish often resulted in partial instruction in Spanish (see Bunch, 2013; Guerrero & Guerrero, 2017). This is a serious issue considering how difficult it is to counteract the pervasive nature of the English language in DLBE classrooms. Nonetheless, the limitations Sonia encountered were counterbalanced by her robust beliefs concerning the need to implement strong DLBE instruction in her school district to promote bilingualism, biliteracy, and sociocultural practices.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190521000106 Published online by Cambridge University Press

## Implications

By creating structures of support (i.e., teacher-driven professional learning communities; see Croft et al., 2010) that highlight teachers' use of Spanish for pedagogical purposes, we could ensure teachers' access to the linguistic, academic, and sociocultural resources needed to foster and promote effective DLBE programs.

Through teacher-driven professional learning communities, DLBE educators can:

- Collectively analyze materials and texts written in Spanish and create consensus as far as the discipline-specific language needed to teach across contents *in* Spanish
- Critically explore new concepts and innovating learning strategies to teach *lecto-escritura* (reading, writing, comprehension) and *conciencia fonológica* (phonemic and phonological awareness) as well as cross-linguistic connections (Spanish and English).
- Consciously identify authentic culturally and linguistically relevant learning materials.

In addition, by using teacher-driven professional learning communities, DLBE teachers can design and plan to implement translanguaging spaces (see Cenoz, 2017; Garcia & Li, 2014), creating opportunities for analysis and adaptations as they observe and analyze in their own teaching contexts how these teaching approaches support student learning. This is where the role of leadership becomes increasingly significant; that is, school and district leaders seeking to build a sound and robust DLBE program must be aware of the flexibility needed to dynamically create spaces where teachers can collaborate with each other and develop their own pedagogical language knowledge in Spanish.

## Conclusion

DLBE teachers cannot be expected to transform and advocate for DLBE programs without having access to crucial metalinguistic, content, and cognitive resources/support. Furthermore, if DLBE teachers are expected to navigate restrictive linguistic classroom policies at the school and district levels, they should be equipped with the resources needed to create innovative teaching and learning spaces designed to disrupt monolingual orientations. DLBE teachers should be provided with ample opportunities to co-construct structures of support in order to design curricula that highlight the academic, linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural resources of their students and families (see Herrera, 2016; Herrera et al., 2020).

If we seek to teach and learn in multilingual communities wherein learners are able to: (a) use their linguistic repertoires to acquire and demonstrate knowledge; (b) envision meaningful translanguaging practices; (c) increase their own metalinguistic awareness across both languages; and (d) critically analyze texts and materials presented to them, then we need teachers who are capable of developing their own ideological clarity (i.e., disrupting linguistic deficit views) (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017) as they negotiate the sociolinguistic and political implications of what it means to teach and learn in multilingual classrooms.

## Note

1 50/50: 50% of the time in the LOTE and 50% of the time in English. 90/10: 90% of the time in the LOTE in grades PK-2 and 10% of the time in English. By 3rd grade, the program is using the 50/50 model.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190521000106 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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**Cite this article:** Barko-Alva, K. (2022). Enseñando *en español*: The need to support dual language bilingual education teachers' pedagogical language knowledge. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *42*, 18–24. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190521000106