

AESLA20192642

PROPOSAL AESLA, UVA 2019: INDIVIDUAL PAPER

Bilingualism and languages in contact
University of Valladolid
27-29 March 2019

The Multicompetences of the bilingual mind: A cross linguistic comparison between English and Spanish

Effective communication is putting an idea into someone else's head, or conversely, it is each individual's ability to capture an idea. In the globalized world today, this interactivity is key. When more than one language interact in speakers with different linguistic profiles, the bilingual mind is constantly encoding and decoding messages. The linguistic phenomena that emerge are far reaching and challenging to define. What happens when there is a discursive clash between the languages? The main objective of this study is to delve into a cross-cultural communicative context. There is something uniquely human about the evolution of knowledge through communication. While this is seemingly a universal concept, our focus will move from what is universal about communication to what is distinctly unique about the way English and Spanish differ in similar contexts. The underlying theories will uncover some of the main ingredients to proper discourse. Grice's cooperative principle will play a role as will the more cognitive roles regarding the relation between discourse and memory (Braddeley, 2007).

The study aims to move beyond description to an action research methodology which is clearly grounded in practice and informed by theory. By presenting examples cross linguistically from several different contexts about how language is created in our imperfect, but highly functional bilingual brains, the discussion will challenge listeners to think not only about their message, but how that message is encoded and decoded. Clearly, this happens at both the micro and macro linguistic levels. Discourse analysts study larger chunks of language as they flow together (Tannen, 2012). In the case of this presentation, we hope to illustrate how many things we take for granted when communicating in a second language, in order to shed some light on how language shapes the way we communicate in bilingual settings.

Note to organizers: The most direct implications of this research are in the field of language acquisition, language teaching and discourse analysis. I have selected Pragmatics as the topic, but the discussion will clearly overlap into the other categories. I must confess the topic is more about proper communication.

Keywords: Cross cultural comparison English/Spanish, Linguistic relativity, Bilingualism, Metacognition

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