MA IN LEARNING AND
TEACHING PROCESSES
IN SECOND LANGUAGES

ML2

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Paper 1:

Learning and Teaching
World Languages: Four Challenges for
Advanced Education in Latin America

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Learning and Teaching World Languages:
Four Challenges for Advanced Education
in Latin America

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Abstract

Current issues and trends in today's linguistic ecologies are shifting from looking at second and additional languages as regional matters and discussing them as global languages. In Latin America, English, is increasingly positioning itself to share the global market with Spanish and Portuguese (two other languages that are becoming global languages in their own right). However, the English Language Teaching community (both in Colombia and Latin America at large) still needs to participate more actively in these debates and think carefully of what a shift toward discussions of world languages really entails. This chapter is the result of a reflexivity (Archer, 2007; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Mora, 2011b) process within a recently chartered MA program in Colombia (Mora, 2013d). This reflexivity proposes four challenges that old and new graduate programs alike need to consider in order to address the new linguistic ecologies that will become contentious in our region: The emergence of more inclusive language frameworks; the need for new definitions and concepts to understand languages beyond the L1; the need to raise new questions about and in research; and the need for new pedagogical and didactic models..

Introduction

In an event we held in Medellín, Colombia to launch a new MA program in the field of second languages (Mora, 2013d), our keynote speaker, Dr. Suzanne Hilgendorf (Hilgendorf, 2013) raised a number of issues and questions about the role of English in an increasingly globalized (Blommaert, 2010) world. In those discussions about issues of globalization and nativization of languages (Hilgendorf, 2013) or the emerging research agendas in the places traditionally known as the "expanding circle" (Kachru, 1996), a notion that I have begun to question in some of my current research (Mora, Gómez, Castaño, Pulgarín, Ramírez, & Mejía-Vélez, 2013c), there was an underlying invitation to rethink language learning and teaching in Colombia and Latin America at large. Reading Dr. Hilgendorf's words, I felt a call to be more active and

proactive in joining these larger debates, something that has substantiated evidence in the literature. For instance, an analysis of the recent literature in World Englishes in Latin America usually yields the same result: A special issue of *World Englishes* back in 2003 (Friedrich & Berns, 2003). In the Colombian context, while there are at least three major journals in ELT in the country, there remains a paucity of Colombian scholarship in international language journals. If one were to understand the state of affairs of English in Colombia, one would only find one article by Velez-Rendon (2003) and a book chapter by González (2010) as evidence[1]. There have been discussions about bilingualism, but as Mora and Golovátina-Mora (2012) have found, even the scope of those discussions remains limited.

That said, I believe all of Latin America finds itself in a very interesting moment to engage in a reflexivity (Mora, 2011, 2012a, 2014d) about what it means to learn and teach languages in our region. I will return to Colombia for a moment to mention what this expansion to which I refer looks like. As a country in the midst of economic and social growth, which has the world looking at us with different eyes (examples of this include the recent award bestowed upon my hometown, Medellín, as the world's most innovative city [Wall Street Journal, 2013]), Colombia is not rethinking itself as a site to learn both Spanish and English. Efforts to improve Spanish instruction include massive efforts at the government and university levels to promote the country as a site for foreigners to learn Spanish (Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 2012). These efforts, coupled with the participation in networks such as the System for Certification and Evaluation of Spanish as a Foreign Language – SICELE (Jaramillo, Naranjo, & González R., 2011) are making Colombia a new active participant in the Spanish teaching community. In the case of English, there is also an interest in using the islands of San Andrés, Providencia, and Santa Catalina, places where English ranges between being a native language and the second language close to creole to many inhabitants (González, 2010), as a site for Colombian and Central American teachers to improve their English.

These efforts to improve language instruction are not the only evidence of this ongoing growth; graduate-level education provides another salient example. In the analysis of the master's programs in the field of second languages in Colombia, we found that, until 2012 (when we were writing our conceptual and legal documents for the Ministry of Education), we found that there were only 12 master's programs in the field[2]. Only five of them were located outside Bogotá and all but two of them focused on English (and only one had an emphasis line in Spanish). Fast forward to July, 2013: in addition to the MA program at my university (with dual foci on English and Spanish), three more programs in Spanish as a second language have appeared, as well as two more programs in English. While far from the ideal levels that countries like Brazil, Mexico, Argentina or Chile still display, this is a significant growth for a country where advanced education in second languages remains uncharted territory in many areas.

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[1] Mora (2014, 2015) has also undertaken some further analysis from a literacy perspective.
[2] A few more programs have appeared since ML2 first started.

Finally, in addition to the changes in government and advanced education, there is the recognition that Colombia is anything but a monolingual nation (Mora, 2012f). According to government surveys (Instituto Caro y Cuervo, n.d.; Landaburu, 1999; Ministerio de Cultura, 2008), besides Spanish as our official language (Instituto Caro y Cuervo, n.d.) and a bevy of languages present in our educational system (such as English, French, or German), the Colombian government has awarded 65 indigenous languages, 2 Afro-Colombian languages, 1 Romani language (Landaburu, 1999; Ministerio de Cultura, 2008), and Colombian Sign Language (Instituto Caro y Cuervo, n.d.) recognition as national languages. This discovery raises even more questions about what talking about bilingualism (Golovátina-Mora, 2012a, b; Mora, 2012f; Mora & Golovátina-Mora, 2011) would entail both in Colombia and all of Latin America, where indigenous and European languages are in constant contact and even conflict.

This background, although here mostly described about Colombia, as I have argued, is not necessarily unique to my country. Latin American language education at the graduate levels needs to consider that we all must rethink how we are educating the next cadres of educational leaders and researchers. We have new questions and new challenges. In this chapter, I will share four challenges that a group of researchers at my home university have raised in the process of building this new MA program[3] and within what we affectionately call the "ML2[4] Community". These four challenges represent our thoughts about what we believe should be the major issues that graduate programs in our field must meet in order to actively participate in the larger debates taking place in all corners of the world. We present these challenges as four major needs:

- The need for more inclusive language frameworks,
- The need for new definitions for languages beyond the mother tongue,
- The need for new questions about research, and
- The need for new pedagogical and didactic models.

While these questions are already part and parcel of our program, this reflection is an invitation to begin a much bigger conversation in our region. We do not believe these challenges are germane to our country, but they are important considerations for Latin America.

[3] MA in Learning and Teaching Processes in Second Languages

[4] We began to use ML2 as an acronym for the MA program from its inception, and it has been part of our promotional and image efforts ever since.

Challenge 1: The Need for More Inclusive Language Frameworks

As Mora (2012c, 2012d, in press; Mora & Golovátina-Mora, 2011; Mora & Muñoz Luna, 2012) has argued, languages and English in particular can be tools that promote either equity or marginalization (A. Luke, 2004). However, as Pennycook (2001) has explained, the majority of language practices seem to lend themselves to marginalization rather than equity. We need to carefully interrogate the kinds of practices that we are promoting in our classrooms and whether those practices are equitable. In this context, equitable makes references to issues like who has access to resources and language. We can no longer promote language practices that enable a few to have access to multiple resources, better prepared teachers, more options for technology use and language practice. We can no longer remain silent while, across the same city, some students have all the resources I mentioned in the previous sentence while others barely have textbooks and, if lucky, an English teacher with a degree in English education (Mora, 2012d; 2015b). As a community of researchers and teachers, enabling (whether by participation or negligence) practices that favor a few and deny access to the others needs to be the object of reflections and calls for action.

In this interrogation of language practices, we need to ask ourselves how we are considering matters of plurilingualism, multiculturalism, and diversity. While it holds true that we may favor the teaching of English over other languages, we cannot sacrifice the cultural and linguistic values that other languages offer (Pattanayak, 2000). We also need to question whether there is room for local values (Higgins, 2009; Jordan, 2011) in the English classroom, or if we are just using the classroom as a tool to promote American and British cultures, as often happens in Latin America (Rajagopalan, 2010). I am not saying that students do not have a right to learn about the English-speaking cultures. On the contrary, they all should have a glimpse to culture, but never if the price to pay is a devaluation of their identity. Students must be immersed in the target language and cultures (as a plural term, if one recognizes that the number of English-speaking nations is much larger than two) and should learn how to incorporate some of the values in these cultures to their identity kits. However, they should also learn to use the language to talk about themselves. As Mora and colleagues (Mora, Martínez, Zapata-Monsalve, Alzate-Pérez, & Gómez-Yepes, 2012) explained, language practices should also provide opportunities for

> A look about immersion from within: Immersion, in our view, can also be about using the target language to discover features about our own culture and communities. This would be, then, the first step before sharing our findings about ourselves with others around the world. (p. 2097)

We also need to rethink how we discuss bilingualism in what is an otherwise multilingual region such as Latin America. Mora (2012f; 2015b) has questioned how realistic it is to talk about *one national bilingual plan*, considering that bilingualism usually means either "English +/- one's mother language" (Mora & Golovátina-Mora, 2011, 2012) in "subtractive bilingualism" (Mora, 2004) framework, where both the national languages and indigenous languages are at risk. Any language policies that we enact in Latin America must first acknowledge that English (or any dominant language, for that matter) will be just one among several that are already in place. Any language policies that exclude (even if accidentally) the linguistic realities of indigenous populations and populations with disabilities are flawed by default and require us to expand our frameworks to include these populations into more equitable language policies.

In this sense, we also have to reframe language use within stronger ethical frameworks. In the context of language learning and teaching, there is a dichotomy that has permeated policies, the curriculum, and even instructional practices: The Native-Non Native Speaker dichotomy (Cook, 1999; Graddol, 2003; Hurst, 2010; Mahboob, 2005). These models, as Mora and Muñoz Luna (2012) discussed, are not only perpetuated in the media but also are the existing guidelines for curricular choices such as whom to assign courses in language centers around the world. These decisions, which more often than not tend to marginalize non-native speakers (sometimes even when place of birth may trump education) are problematic. That does not mean that we should enforce "protectionism for protectionism's sake" (Mora & Muñoz Luna, 2012, p, 0418), but instead that language proficiency should be one of several factors we use to assess teacher quality. Native speakers, especially those with advanced training and high pedagogical backgrounds, will always be a welcome addition. But, we should never default to native speakers when it comes to offering the best language learning experiences, if that means we will marginalize highly qualified teachers because accent remains as the sole criterion by which we judge teachers.

Challenge 2: The Need for New Definitions for Languages Beyond the Mother Tongue

These new times, where discussions of global languages are the norm, are raising new questions. We now need to interrogate how ownership of a language operates in the new superdiverse (Arnaut, 2012; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011) configurations that new forms of migration and technology are providing We have to question how affinity (Black, 2009) is trumping geography as the new form for linguistic communities of practice. We also have to consider how technology and language (Mora, 2012e; in press; Thorne & Black, 2008) are important elements in these language ecologies we face today and how all these

forms of language practice and use are forcing us to rethink policies and the way we frame languages today.

To explain this point, allow me to spend a few lines discussing a recent experience I lived in 2012. At that time, the province of San Andrés, Providencia, and Santa Catalina was affected by a maritime border decision by the International courts in Hague (Wikipedia, 2013). Therefore, the Colombian government sent different task forces for emergency meetings with regional leaders in San Andrés. I was appointed to a task force (along with researchers from four other universities) on language and bilingualism. In our discussion with the Raizal (Afro-Colombian natives of San Andrés) leaders, there was a discussion about how the existing language policies affected them, citing the foreign language standards as an example.

I actually challenged them to revisit (and make the government revisit) these standards in something I have recently called the "San Andrés Paradox" (Mora, 2014c, 2015b) My rationale was simple: There are three languages that operate in San Andrés: Spanish, the official language of the country (as it appears in our constitution), English, a language that has had strong cultural roots in the region since the 16th Century and which still has strong ties to these communities through religion (González Moncada, 2011), and Creole, the de facto native language of the Raizal community. In a case like this, which language can we label as "foreign" language? Is it even fair to label any of them as foreign language, since each of them has cultural value in this region?

While some may dismiss this as a very particular situation in a very particular region of an otherwise "monolingual" country, I believe this is not so unique after all to either Colombia or Latin America. Over the past two years, I have argued that we need to look carefully at new frameworks to define languages beyond one's mother tongue. My belief is that the current binary of second-foreign language (Mora, 2011a) is no longer responding to some of the more complex realities and configurations for languages today (Mora, 2012c, d). I have proposed the notion of second languages (Mora, 2013b. 2015b) as a response to the discussions about additional languages (da Silva, 2011; De Castro, 2010; Judd, Tan, Walberg, & Martinez Gonzalez, n. d.; Rio Grande do Sul, 2009; Thorne & Black, 2008) or new languages (Sanz, 2006) that are also under discussion around the world. We have found that pluralizing second languages actually recognizes that people may speak more than two languages today and that second, in this context has more to do with circumstances (e.g. one's place of residence) than with actual order of learning or a true hierarchy. In this context, the speaker's personal circumstances decide what his /her second language will be.

These new frameworks for languages also provide an invitation to rethink language use in regional (Higgins, 2009) and local contexts. As we begin to look closer to language and literacy practices in spaces outside of school, different and more engaging language uses for languages begin to emerge. We have

discovered some of this in our ongoing research (Mora, Castaño, N. Gómez, & Pulgarín, 2013; Mora, Castaño, N. Gómez, Pulgarín, Mejía-Vélez, & Ramírez, 2013; Mora, Castaño, N. Gómez, Ramírez, Mejía-Vélez, & Pulgarín, 2015) at the Literacies in Second Languages Project (Mora, 2015a). In this study, we have found that Medellín is anything but a monolingual city. We have found that, while English still appears in traditional spaces such as billboards and names of establishments (Velez-Rendon, 2003), English has also become a resource (both linguistic and semiotic) in many other spaces, both physical and cultural (Mora, et al, 2013a, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). This study, at present in its second stage (Mora, Giraldo, Chiquito, Uribe, & Ramírez, 2015; Mora, Salazar Patiño, M. A. Gómez., & Mejía-Vélez, 2015), is providing more clues about how the traditional second-foreign language binary leaves plenty of blank and blind spots for language use. It is also showing us how, once one moves past the traditional definitions for languages or bilingualism, a more "kaleidoscopic" (Heath & Street, 2008) view of languages in the city appears and other languages aid citizens to make better and more creative sense of their own lives in the city.

Challenge 3: The Need for New Questions About Research

So far, I have pointed in this reflection out a number of emerging social phenomena in the field of second languages. Discovering these new phenomena will not be enough unless we carefully revise our frameworks for conducting research. This refers to both the actual approaches for research and the kinds of professional development. In terms of professional development, we need to reconsider research education at the tertiary level, where sometimes the literature seems to be lopsided towards doctoral-level training (Mora & Montoya Marín, 2013). We need to pay more attention at research education since the undergraduate level, in an attempt to establish as sense of continuity that helps teachers develop more realistic research frameworks.

In terms of the different research approaches we use, we need to rethink carefully what approaches we favor and how we do so. As important and necessary as teacher research (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) is, we need to exercise caution when we attempt to create "teacher-sized versions" of approaches such as action research or case study. We must be cautious to find a balance between making them more accessible to teachers and sacrificing some conceptual and epistemological tenets that give the approaches their identity. This is particularly relevant in the case of action research, for instance, where I have seen cases where they offer lighter versions of the approach under the premise that action research is "easier" for teachers to carry out, equating easy with less rigorous. We must not forget that, regardless of who does the research, rigor will always be a requirement of good research (Hostetler, 2005). In the case of action research, this is especially important because of the personal and political ramifications of empowering teachers to become more active in finding solutions to the issues arising in their classes (Noffke, 1997).

These concerns need to surface in the new kinds of questions we must inquire in upcoming and future studies about languages in Colombia and Latin America. We need to question how the existing research approaches, from their epistemological and methodological stances, will help us respond to the new contexts for English, Spanish, or Portuguese in the region. We also need to work, in our preservice, inservice and advanced education programs, toward a stronger conceptual appropriation (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999) or the main precepts and applications of whichever approaches we choose to favor in the field and our programs. We have to make students aware of which "umbrellas" (Mora, 2010) we choose and the implications of doing so (Mora, 2012g). We have to think carefully of what we gain and lose when we adapt these approaches to our local contexts so that we do not sacrifice rigor and systematicity in the name of spreading research in schools.

We also have to remember that language research today requires both novices and seasoned researchers to take on different roles as we engage in these studies. Based on the premise aforementioned that languages can be tools for equity of marginalization, we have to understand research as a tool for advocacy and equity. Many good practices seem to be buried under unequal policies, where teachers never get to tell their stories. Today's research needs to unearth these stories and counter-stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and open spaces for teachers, students, and communities to tell these stories on their own terms. We have to consider research from critical standpoints (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Willis, et al., 2008) that questions not only what the best practices available look like, but whether they really are the most appropriate for the present conditions of today's classrooms in diverse contexts (Mora, 2013b). Finally, there is a need to understand research as leadership, understanding leadership as the possibility to educate researchers with a mindset to not only understand or describe the problems, but also to use research as a tool to promote sustainable, organic (Gramsci, 1971) practices

Challenge 4: The Need for New Pedagogical and Didactic Models

Our reflections in the design of the MA program (Mora, 2013c) led us to one fundamental decision: In order to address some of the new realities that today's linguistic ecologies (Mora, 2012c, 2012d, 2013x. 2014x) were featuring, there was the need to change our current paradigms. We had, therefore, to stop talking about "teaching and learning" and instead talk about "learning and teaching". This change, which goes beyond mere semantics, was an invitation to a different kind of reflexivity (Mora, 2011, 2013c, 2014d) about what it first means to learn a language and the implications for today's environments. Beginning from learning, we believe, opens spaces for deeper questions about how and what we learn as a segue to the much larger reflection of what it means to learn a language *that you are going to teach*. This is a

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question that invites us to look more closely at the different pedagogical and didactic methods and approaches already available and look at the more critically. It invites questions about their relevance in light of these new contexts for language use and it requires teachers to think more carefully about what didactics is really supposed to mean: Not the application of activities and workshops, but a careful consideration of your pupils' needs and realities as the first step toward designing activities that reach out to them in more meaningful ways.

The shift to learning and teaching as foundational elements of how we view languages today also becomes an invitation to consider the new kinds of practices that continue to emerge, as we mentioned above. These considerations are a necessary step to the new views about the use of technology (Mora, et al., 2012a, b; Jaramillo & Gómez, 2013) as a way for students to achieve more meaningful learning and not as doing activities just to use the computers the school just purchased (as found in some of our own inquiries about technology [Mora, et al., 2012a]). It also requires us to rethink how we evaluate (Grupo MELEX, 2010; Martínez, 2010; Vallejo Gómez & Martínez Marín, 2011) our students' work, since the new contexts for learning also bring new sets of challenges on how to best educate our future generations of learners.

Implications of These Challenges

I have laid out so far four challenges for Colombia and Latin America. These challenges, while a reflection we are sharing with other colleagues and teachers, is not mere rhetoric, but a call for action that we have begun to meet through our curricular proposal (Mora, 2013d). We believe that there are five things that we need to address as a response to these challenges. I will outline all five in this section.

A *glocal* view of languages. It is not enough just to frame languages such as English, Spanish, or Portuguese as global languages to highlight the broader audiences of learners they are reaching. We need to understand them as *glocal* ones, as languages that will interact in unusual and creative ways with whichever languages one finds in the different communities where these languages come into play (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010; Jørgensen, Karrebæk, Madsen, & Møller, 2011).

A need for an organic view of didactics. In this glocal perspective, we need to think of didactics in a more contextualized view. Teachers cannot accept methods and approaches at face value without a proper discussion of the existing conditions for their implementation. Rather, we need to think of organic approaches to design and adapt approaches that, while helping students engage in the global communities of practice, recognize their own circumstances and needs.

New socio-cultural and critical views about languages. Language learning, under these conditions, needs to look more carefully at language as a situated event. In that situatedness, language emerges to

provide different uses and to convey different meanings. We must transcend hegemonic (Gramsci, 1971) views of languages that may legitimize language practices from dominant countries to the detriment of localized communities of practice (Mora, 2012d, in press). We need to interrogate these practices from critical perspectives and question carefully not only why we teach languages, but *how* we teach and ultimately *what* we teach (Morrell, 2008). Without these questions, we may become accidental sponsors of hegemonic views of language learning that will not enable our students to engage and appropriate those languages they wish to learn (Mora, 2013a).

Connections between languages and language users. Llurda (2012) made a very interesting distinction between language learners and language users. I agree with his distinction and the actual learning potential that framing people as language users provides. Language users have agency in the decisions they make about languages. It is this agency what lies behind the notion of *second languages* (Mora, 2013b, 2015b) that I introduced earlier in the chapter. The nexus between languages and their users are no longer an issue of geography, but affinity and appropriation. Language users now look at language as a way to find people with whom to share an interest, leaving issues like alleged proficiency or nationality away from these communities (Black, 2009). These connections should also invite us to consider carefully how and why we are encouraging people to learn another language, an issue that oftentimes seems less tied to appropriation and ownership and more to policies and external motivations (Mora, 2013a)

New convergence of languages and codes. The field of literacy, around the world (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, 2009; Leander & Lewis, 2008; Street, 1995, 2006) and Latin America (e.g. Monte Mór, 2006, 2010) has raised a number of questions about the kinds of texts language users are creating in these modern times. In my own inquiries about literacy (Mora, 2009, 2011b, 2011c; 2012b, 2013c; Mora, et al, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c), I have found that texts in a second language are combining more elements of design that make them increasingly multimodal (Kress, 1997; 2003; 2010). These ideas about design and the presence of multiple languages and modes of meaning will emerge more often in the different messages today's language users (old and young alike) will produce. Our teaching (Iyer & C. Luke, C. Luke, 2010) and research (Jewitt, 2008) agendas need to consider this as a new line of inquiry in second languages that we need to pursue in years to come.

Coda: The ML2 Community

The reflections that I have outlined in this chapter are not mine alone. While I started some of them as a doctoral student (Mora, 2004; Mora, 2006; Mora Vélez, 2010), I have found a community of colleagues, friends, and even life partners (my wife and I are both engaged in these discussions from very different

vantage points) whose ideas resonate with mine. We have all converged at the same institution and at the same program in we call the "ML2 Community". This community is interdisciplinary by nature. We all come from very different fields but share a common desire to think about language learning and teaching in different terms. We believe that, without a true commitment to social justice, teachers and teacher educators might repeat the same instances of marginalization and inequality that we have so fiercely denounced. We believe that language learning and teaching without an ethical dimension will promote dehumanizing language practices that will still favor an elite few to the detriment of many others. Finally, we are deeply concerned about the idea of learning with a stronger and more meaningful process: The empowerment of people through language so that they can use language to improve their communities and surroundings as much as they improve themselves.

However, we believe that our dreams and ideas go beyond our ML2 Community. We are certain that there are many more scholars, teachers, and researchers in Latin America and the world who share the same questions and wish to face these same challenges as our Community does. This chapter is nothing but an invitation to look at these challenges, see what they look like in your communities and work with us to find stronger and more sustainable solutions to these challenges. That is the intent behind our program and the ML2 Community. I am just grateful for the chance to engage more committed scholars into these conversations.

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