CHAPTER I

Introduction to the Study

The conversations examined in this study describe the speech activity of a bilingual child. The child frames experience through the medium of two languages: Chinese and English. In her daily activity with her Chinese mother and American father, she participates in frames of reference that are both linguistic and cultural. She participates in two symbol systems.

Controversy persists, however, over the advantages of being bilingual. At one time bilingualism was described as a handicap, as detrimental to the development of intelligence (Hakuta, 1986). Hakuta traces this belief to present attitudes toward bilingualism: “There exists a persistent belief that for minority children, bilingualism confuses the mind and retards cognitive development” (1986, p. 17). Moll describes what he considers a deficit view to bilingual children, that bilingual researchers and practitioners “uncritically accept … a limited vision of students” (1992, p. 21). Both writers agree that bilingual education is anchored in an incomplete understanding of bilingual children.

Crawford (1995) admits that basic research into bilingualism is lacking. There is a great deal of uncertainty as to how a bilingual student learns and thinks through the medium of two languages. Hakuta (1990) also calls for more basic research, toward contributing to a more “accurate image of a bilingual child” (p. 19). A study of bilinguals requires much more than a description of two languages occupying a single mind. It requires attention to mind and languages in social contexts (Snow, 1992; Pease-Alvarez & Hakuta, 1992). Moll’s (1992) answer to the gap is for researchers to study more how bilingual children acquire knowledge at home.

The ethnography of speaking is one approach for describing speech activity. The approach is an inductive effort toward recording the activities of speakers within a speech community. The anthropologist Hymes defines the approach as “concerned with the situation and uses, the patterns and functions, of speaking as an activity in its own right” (1974, p. 191). The approach seeks to examine speech in context: how linguistic, cognitive, and cultural dimensions form single speech events.

Hymes (1974) describes the approach as a “contrast within a frame” (p. 192) method. Speakers of different languages may be examined within a set context, their speech activity compared and described. Hymes (1974) suggests a description of the patterns and functions of speech within the framed context. The method highlights the need for greater attention to language not as words and sentences, but language as a dynamic component of human action.

Hymes (1980) argues for applying the approach to bilingual education. The ethnography of speaking presents bilingual learners in all their complexity:

The ethnographic approach can go beyond tests and surveys to document and interpret the social meaning of success and failure to bilingual education. (p. 117)

What Hymes (1980) points to is research grounded in assumptions that differ from that of the evaluative research cited by Crawford (1995). Hymes’ (1980) ethnographic approach builds on
the observation techniques of anthropology, not the experimentalist paradigms of psychology. Thus the ethnography of speaking may be an answer to the basic research gap plaguing bilingual education. It is from this approach that this study describes not necessarily a unique individual, but a dual individual: a child who participates in the activities of two speech communities.

Three perspectives

The bilingual education controversy revolves around a single question: How can two languages exist in a single mind? To the assimilationists who oppose bilingual education, such a condition risks a divided mind: society requires a standardization of thought and language, with schools enforcing uniformity. Citizens of this nation only succeed through the conceptual tools of a single American tongue. Only one frame of reference is necessary: an English language one. Opposed to this, the pluralists who support bilingual education see a bilingual mind as reflective of America’s great diversity. The condition of two languages enhances not only thinking, but also a child’s grasp of the increasingly diverse society awaiting in the next century.

To date basic research in bilingualism has been largely unable to provide more than fragmented answers to the above question. Traditionally, the answer has been a linguistic one: that two languages exist as two competencies together in the same mind. Linguistics has tended to overlook where those two languages may intersect with other cognitive or social competencies, especially with the mind’s conceptual organization. The sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (1996, 1978) has emerged in recent years as providing a more holistic account of two languages in one mind, but has left unclear how mind and language join.

As stated, research into bilingualism has traditionally focused on the linguistic dimensions of bilingualism: bilingualism as a condition featuring dual syntactic and semantic systems. Hakuta (1992), though, criticizes such a view as too narrow; he urges us to look at the whole picture of a bilingual child. Bilingualism encompasses more than two languages in a single mind.

It is this linguistic view of bilingualism that has helped policy makers and opponents of bilingual education. Managing the linguistic dimension through mandating ESL (English as a second language) classes is certainly more feasible than managing the host of factors surrounding LM (language minority) students: poverty, illiteracy, immigration, high drop out rates, and the lack of trained teachers and instructional materials designed for their needs (Crawford, 1997; GAO, 1994). Hakuta would no doubt see actions such as Proposition 227 in California as a narrow solution to a limited understanding of how a bilingual mind works. Hence, Hakuta calls for researchers to examine bilingualism in its complexity, including attention to “theoretical questions about language and cognition” (1986, p. 19).

Macnamara (1985) sees the research problem as tied to a particular component of the linguistic dimension: semantics. He points to an inadequate theory of semantics as preventing the research from finding coherence: “Yet without an adequate theory of semantics, psychology and linguistics (and possibly philosophy) rapidly reach an impasse” (1985, p. 102). With these basic fields of inquiry stuck at the semantic problem, argues Macnamara (1985), research into bilingualism remains stuck, too.

Such a theory may be possible with greater attention to the sociocultural environment surrounding bilingualism, with what Edwards (1994) calls the ecology of language. The
traditional fields listed above focus on the individual person, yet attention to the ecology of language places that person within the complexity called for by Hakuta (1989). Echoing Hakuta (1989), Edwards (1994) notes how the traditional linguistic paradigm has failed “to give sufficient treatment to ecological variables” (p. 138).

One answer proposed toward including ecological variables is a Vygotskian one. A number of researchers, in bilingual education research (Collier, 1995; Cummins, 1994), in psychology (Wertsch, 1991; Bruner, 1986), and in education (Moll, 1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) have adopted or developed Vygotskian approaches to their particular fields. A consensus is now emerging toward a sociocultural paradigm. Researchers in second language learning research (Long, 1990; Fillmore, 1985) are also beginning to recognize the need to account for social and interactive factors in the second language learning. In short, a number of researchers have begun to look at social dimensions connected to the linguistic one.

A Vygotskian paradigm calls for a radical shift, from the individual learner to the learner as but one component in an interactive system. McLaughlin and McLeod note the importance of such a transformation: “These developments are part of a shift away from a structural objectivism and toward a constructivism of meaning and thought” (1996, p. 3). The missing semantic component observed by Macnamara (1985) plays an important role in a Vygotskian model, as part of this constructivism. In addition, the model links the bilingual child to more than school activity. Such a model provides an understanding of the bilingual child in home, peer, and schooling contexts (McLaughlin & McLeod, 1996; Kagan & Garcia, 1992; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). This is the broad complexity suggested by Hakuta (1989), who sees a strong need for connecting cultural, psychological, and linguistic factors in a coherent framework.

Bruner (1986) warns us, though, that Vygotsky’s contribution is only that of a broad framework: Vygotsky (1996) does not tell us exactly how the complexity suggested by Hakuta (1989) takes shape. Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of scaffolding has been touted as the means by which mind and language develop in society; by scaffolding the mind develops through regulation by others to regulation within oneself: Regulation enables a young mind to direct activity toward completion. Thought develops from social interaction to conceptual activity. Still, as Bruner points out: “Nowhere in Vygotsky’s writings is there any concrete spelling out of what he means by such scaffolding” (1986, p. 74).

Wertsch (1991) turns to a contemporary of Vygotosky’s. Wertsch believes that Vygotsky established a broad theory of mediated action within a sociocultural theory. Yet Wertsch feels it “ironic” (1991, p. 46) that Vygotsky outlines his broad theory based on his studies of small groups or dyadic interaction. Wertsch (1991) looks for “broader historical, institutional, or cultural processes” (p. 46) to build on Vygotsky’s foundation. Toward that aim, Wertsch proposes the Russian semiotician M.M. Bakhtin, whose explanations of such concepts as utterance and voice encompass a more specific outline of how mind and language and culture come together.

To study the complexity of two languages in one mind, Agar (1994) proposes the term languaculture. As Agar describes languaculture:

The langua in languaculture is about discourse, not just about words and sentences. And the culture in languaculture is about meanings that include, but go well beyond, what the dictionary and the grammar offer. (1994, p. 96)
Agar calls our attention, then, to the patterns of cultural activity repeated daily within a particular culture. It is within those patterns that meaning is enacted in situations, fusing language and mind and society in episodic action. Meaning is an interaction of minds in standard forms of cultural transactions: meeting strangers, eating meals, conducting business, managing home life. Agar (1994) further links his work with that of Whorf (1958), who also connects ways of acting with ways of thinking and speaking.

Agar (1994) proposes the concept of a frame as a unit for studying languaculture. Borrowing the term from artificial intelligence, Agar posits a frame as a means of organizing experience. Actions and words are framed in discourse. Frames both limit what is possible within a context-- what topics of conversation and action are possible-- and provide expected background information. The frame works like a single picture frame in a film, freezing actors and situation in a single scene. Thus, by viewing the frame, we look at a single episode of thought, language, and culture. Frames act like scripts for such episodes, but scripts that are defined within particular languacultures.

For this study, a frame is taken as a unit of conversation that talks about a single theme, as performed within a single context of activity. As a unit of conversation it features talk, but talk as combined with a theme topic and contextual activity. The unit frames talk, topic, and behavior. It is a unit cut from the long stream of speech making up a larger conversation.


Research Questions

Should a bilingual child participate in an activity, at one time in one language, and another time in the second language, we should expect to see different frames. It is the same activity, but performed through the medium of two different languages, with each language featuring different conceptual organization of the activity topic. We would find evidence of the conceptual frames embedded within the linguistic frames of the activity.

With the above considerations, toward an understanding of the conceptual and linguistic patterns of a child bilingual in Chinese and English, the following research questions are proposed:

1. What are the activity frames patterned by the Chinese and English languacultures?
2. How do the frame structures differ between those languages?
3. What are the conceptual frames patterned by the Chinese and English languacultures?
4. How do the conceptual frames differ between those languages?
The above research questions, then, point us toward a partial answer of the larger question confronting bilingual education: how two languages interact within the mind of a single bilingual child.

**Introducing the study**

The participant for this study was a five-year old bilingual child, who was fluent in Chinese and English. Her first language was Chinese, the language of her mother; her father, the author of this study, is an American who speaks only English to her. She was born in Shanghai, and often raised with the help of elderly Chinese for day care. Her use of Chinese has declined since entering American schools, though she attends classes in written Chinese, learning the many characters that make up the written script, one afternoon a week. Her mother and Chinese friends continue to speak with her in Chinese.

In December, 1995 the father started collecting speech samples through audio taping of the child playing two games: Jenga and Pickup Sticks. The taping continued through January, 1996. A total of eight 90-minute tapes were collected at the time, the game play on each side ranging from thirty to the full forty-five minutes. Half the tapes recorded games played in Chinese, between the mother and daughter; the other half recorded the same games played in English.

For this particular study, the first tape for each language was selected. The reason for choosing the first tape, besides the obvious one of starting with the first, was that the first games featured more apparent negotiation of meaning. The games had recently been purchased as a gift for the child, so the tape records the first games played. Thus the negotiation of meaning recorded includes to some degree each parent establishing the ground rules for each game. It should be noted that the first games were played with the mother, so the games with the father occurred after some previous experience. Part of the father-daughter interaction features the daughter interacting from the previously learned game in Chinese; the father had never played the game before that time.

The tapes were then transcribed according to a system outlined by Agar (1987). Following the transcription, the conversations recorded were divided and cut up into frames: each frame represented a short conversation falling between changes in speech topic and intonation contours. Analysis proceeded first by categorizing and description of the different frames, and second, by recording speech utterances and their grammatical-conceptual frames.

**Definitions**

For this study the following terms were defined.

*Conceptual frames* are grammatical patterns that correspond with classes of semantically related words. Conceptual frames do not refer to parts of speech such as nouns or verbs or adjectives, but refer to linguistic features in which word classes are inserted. There is a class of verbs, for example, that can only be followed by an infinitive, featuring the pattern “verb + to ______.” To this verb class we may add *plan, hope, intend, manage, expect,* and *like.* This conceptual frame is that of future action: a concept of influencing events that have yet to happen.
A common problem for English speakers learning Chinese is that of the particle “le.” Le indicates a conceptual frame of a change in state. American speakers of Chinese tend to confuse the particle with the past tense, a conceptual frame more “natural” for American speakers. Thus Chinese may make patterns such as “xia4 yu3 le,” (See page 65 for an explanation of numbered tonal markers) roughly meaning raining, but conceptually indicating in Chinese that a changed has occurred: from no rain to rain. As another example, “chi1 hao3 le” expresses a change in state to indicate fullness after eating; the author as an English speaker requires a sense of sequence to explain the change. A Chinese speaker, however, would not feel such a sequence.

Hymes (1974) links such conceptual frames to context, noting the cognitive dimension to the ethnography of speaking:

The use of a linguistic form identifies a range of meanings. A context can support a range of meanings. When a form is used in a context, it eliminates the meanings possible to that context other than those that form the signal; the context eliminates from consideration the meanings possible to the form other than those that context can support. The effective meaning depends upon the interaction of the two. (p. 194)

This is at the center of Wittgenstein’s (1958) philosophy: that concepts need be understood not through the traditional philosophical criterion of truth versus falsity, but by reference to the concept’s grammar in ordinary language. Conceptual frames are the cognitive dimension of the languaculture.

Form class refers to the class of words that occupy a single conceptual frame. Whereas the conceptual frame is the linguistic form, the form class is the content: the word items that fill in the frame. Take as an example the speech function permission. The act of permission hinges on the word can, as in “You can’t do that yet” or “You can see her now.” To identify something, though, depends on the copula or BE verb: “That’s a blue one.” As another possibility, the function obligation depends on modal expressions: ought, should, had better.

Taking the example “You can’t do that yet,” we see a conceptual frame with can: “You can’t _____ that yet.” To the possibility marked by can, one may insert a form class of activity words: do, try, start, test, trigger. One may also include a set of symbolizing verbs: write, mark, color, record, check, letter. Form classes are not meant here as parts of speech, as in nouns or verbs, but groups or sets of words sharing similar meanings.

Fragmentary utterance refers to an utterance or unit of speech that does not contribute information contents to the conversation topic. Conversation fragments include false starts, incomplete words, and disconnected syllables. These fragmentary utterances carry no real information and so are not included in this study.

A frame is an episodic unit of speaking activity derived from a conversation, centered on a single topic-concept and comprised of a structured sequence of speech functions. Goffman (1974) compares a frame to a single frame within a comic strip: a single scene with actors performing a single act of conversation. Just as a comic strip includes any number of frames, the progression of a conversation includes frames as bounded episodes, each having a beginning, middle, and end. Frames are functional, too, performing an act within a larger conversation of a number of possible acts.
Frame structure refers to a linear sequence of speech functions. Agar (1994) posits a framework of functional speech acts, the contents filled in by the conceptual contents. Key to the frame structure are the speech functions.

Functional speech acts refer to the purpose or task of each utterance within the frame sequence. Functions are described here with a gerund noun marking the purpose of a particular utterance or unit of speech. Some examples: requesting, denying, confirming, reporting. It is the speech function that unites the activity with its cognitive and linguistic dimensions. See the Appendices for lists of speech functions.

Languaculture is Agar’s (1994) term for the episodic performance of language and culture in conversation. By languaculture is meant the unity of perception, acting, thinking, and saying in modes of conversation. Since topics of conversation and modes of action differ from culture to culture, languaculture is culturally specific.

Regulatory utterance refers to an utterance or unit of speech by which speakers regulate the performance of speech within a conversation. According to Chafe (1994) regulatory utterances include interactional types (e.g. you know, you got it, hmm), cognitive (e.g. let me see, I know), and validational (e.g. maybe, perhaps, I think). Regulatory utterances allow speakers to edit and control utterances in a conversation, toward bringing about desired outcomes to a conversation.

A substantive utterance is an utterance that conveys information. It includes speech about something: events, referents, activity states. Chafe (1994) describes the substantial utterance as occurring as a single clause, which he defines as a thought unit falling between a rise and fall in pitch contours.

Assumptions

The assumptions for this study are tied to the ethnography of speaking. They include the following:

- Speech is organized within sequential patterns of action.
- Mind is combined with speech within this situated activity.
- The mind of a single bilingual child is representative of the speech community.
- The study results are generalizable to other bilingual children.

We now turn to these assumptions.

Speech is organized within sequential patterns of action. Frames proceed in a linear fashion, from the triggering of the frame through a new topic or initiating speech function such as a question, through the functional structure of the frame, to a closing mechanism. Each utterance within the frame is coherently linked to others through related functions and topic references.

Mind is combined with speech in situated activity. Mind, topic-concepts, and activity converge within each utterance of the frame, the form class as the focal point of that convergence. As members of a speech community participate in the daily tasks and contexts of their environments, they interact in regular patterns with each other, the artifacts of their society,
and with the institutional tasks of their culture. It is this regularity of activity, of engaging in these daily contexts, that conversation is applied.

It is within this public realm, of the daily business of rising and going to work, attending meetings, making phone calls, and returning home in the evening, that we frame concepts. In the conduct of our daily tasks, a range of acceptable topics is permissible. The topics take the form of conceptual frames. The grammar set by the speech functions applies conceptual frames situated within the discourse. We frame concepts, though, with a historically situated conceptual stock of ideas; the very stuff of conceptual systems covering technology, skills, beliefs, and human action.

The mind of a single bilingual child is representative of the speech community. The frames of a culture’s languaculture act as frames for indexing experience. They provide a common medium through which communication takes place. Without this common ground established within the frame, communication breaks down. Meaning depends on a shared understanding, a background of expectations that is established through the common conceptual stock and speech-activity patterns of a language. A single mind, such as the one in this study, works through the collective medium. Therefore, any member of the speech community is necessarily representative of the rest.

The study results are generalizable to other bilingual children. This assumption rests on the previous one. Each bilingual child acts and thinks with the combined experience of two speech communities. Though each bilingual child does so through specific conceptual and grammatical patterns, all contend to varying degrees with this dual activity. Bilingualism is participation in two conversation systems.

The Parent as Researcher

As the heading indicates, this study has a number of limitations that should be addressed. Most of these limitations, though, fall under the parent-researcher role. As Bissex sums it up (1980), the strongest limitation is that of the parent maintaining enough distance from what the child is doing to be able to see the activity as a researcher and not as a parent.

Certainly, this is not easily done; Spradley’s (1980) definition of the participant observer alludes to the sticky issue of how far a researcher can participate in activity before losing an outsider perspective. Paradoxically, at some point the observer becomes what is being observed.

Naturally, qualitative research has inherent difficulties with subjective experience. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) point out that

Even if the influence of the researcher could be eliminated through adoption of the ‘complete’ observer or ‘complete participant’ role, not only would this place serious restrictions on the data collection process, it would also in no sense guarantee ‘valid data.’ (p. 112)

In short, as hard as we try, there is always a great deal of researcher effect. Bias is always with us, too. What Delamont (1990) recommends is more reflective consideration of fieldwork: exposing how the process of investigating is conducted. In this case, the parent-researcher needs
to examine where and how parenting activity may creep into the investigative activity, or vice versa.

Still, there are advantages. The parent-researcher can elicit speech patterns and social behavior impossible with another adult. The parent-research works as an inside-outsider to discover a reality that is privy to the confines of home and family where young children spend most of their waking hours. More importantly, the home ranks as the chief institution for socialization; an insider view of the child in such an environment only balances a research picture that is heavily dependent on what the child does strictly within the confines of school. The parent as researcher, in conclusion, presents a number of unique advantages to child research, but this must include constant reflective practice. The parent as researcher co-constructs frames with the child that would differ from other kinds of social interaction. The danger to validity results from slipping from a parental role, in the natural activity of the game, into a less natural stance of playing researcher.

**Delimitations**

The study is an ethnographic study of conversation. The information collected on the child is recorded on audiotapes and transcripts for coding and analysis. The qualitative study is exploratory: it compares speech samples of child-parent interaction while the child plays a game with each parent. The study is limited to verbal material in English and Mandarin Chinese. More specifically, the study only examines the substantive utterances of that material as produced in the conversations of a five-year old bilingual child with her parents.

**Analytical Framework**

Agar (1994) traces his notion of a frame back to the artificial intelligence community, citing the need for a frame unit to program intelligent machines. The original credit for frames may be linked to one of those researchers: Minsky (1981), who defines a frame as “a data-structure for representing a stereotyped situation, like being in a certain kind of living room, or going to a child’s birthday party” (1981, p. 96). Expectations of those situations become fused with certain kinds of context clues.

Minsky (1985) was looking for ways to package information into programmable units. Minsky later describes a frame with greater attention to form than an event:

> A frame is a sort of skeleton, somewhat like an application form with many blanks or slots to be filled. We’ll call these blanks its terminals; we use them as connection points to which we can attach other kinds of information. For example, a frame that represents a “chair” might have some terminals to represent a seat, a back, and legs … (1985, p. 245)

A key feature in Minsky’s later description of frame is that of the default assumption. This assumption demonstrates how frames work with but a few perceptual clues: the frame is activated with minimal information. “As soon as you hear a word like ‘person’, ‘frog’, or ‘chair’, you assume the details of some ‘typical’ sort of person, frog, or chair” (Minsky, 1985, p. 245). Past experience, then, plays a strong influence in Minsky’s theory of frames.
The notion of framing certain kinds of information into whole units, through repeated experience with specific contexts, alludes to another term from the artificial intelligence community: scripts. Schank and Abelson (1977) also look toward constructing a smart machine, a machine that can infer scripts from repeated situations. With theoretical complexity akin to Minsky’s (1985), they set out to demonstrate how a mind organizes experience. Scripts for Schank and Abelson include the following:

- background information
- role relationships
- script trigger mechanisms
- rules for interaction
- a narrative database of human action

Schank and Abelson (1977) describe human knowledge as composed of scripts, plans, goals, and themes. Each of these depends on background expectations in the form of thematic information about human action.

For Agar (1994), such a description of frames is too limited. Researchers in artificial intelligence work to reduce large data frames to mathematical principles. Such a description is for Agar too tight: even a restaurant context can not easily be reduced to a script. Finding seating and ordering menus can face any number of hurdles. Preferred seats in a nonsmoking section, for example, may not be available. A waiter may have to explain menu items in greater detail, or face a special request on changing a menu item. Each case requires greater negotiation of talk, potentially transforming a more routine social situation into unexpected changes in meaning.

Other social scientists have tried to examine cultural differences through frames. The linguist Pike (1967) looked at segments of activity, each segment having a beginning, middle, and end. Presenting the examples of a football game and a church service, Pike describes such segments as being comprised of functional slots: “for each slot there is a class of segments appropriate to that slot, and actually or potentially observed there” (1967, p. 83). Thus a church service may have functional slots for an opening ceremony, a benediction, a sermon, and community announcements. Each of these, in turn, may be made up of a number of possible slots, too. According to Pike (1967), each slot features the following:

- a class of actions appropriate to the slot
- a beginning, middle, and end
- a perceptual focus (e.g. a tail gate focuses attention on to a coming game)
- actors/participants
- goals/intentions
- segment markers
- irrelevant behavior (e.g. coughing, passing a note, etc.)

Within each slot, Pike (1967) combines language and activity with perceptual processes. Language and action can not be divided in Pike’s model of unified action.

Frames organize coordinated events around the actors in those events, their relationships to each other, interpretations of the events, rules for providing restraints, and boundaries for marking the frame. Overall, Goffman (1974) presents a dynamic view of framing, with persons sometimes breaking frames, fabricating frames through deceit or dishonesty, and even clashing over which frame is most appropriate for a situation.

Other anthropologists have contributed to frame theory, too. Bateson (1972) compares frames to mathematical sets, with the frame acting as a class of meaningful acts, and a picture frame, which sets a picture against a bounded background. Bateson (1972) further observes that kinds of frames are common to our vocabulary: “In many instances, the frame is consciously recognized and even represented in vocabulary (‘play,’ ‘movie, ‘interview,’ ‘job,’ ‘language,’ etc.)” (1972, p.187). In other words, frames are built into our understanding of human action, organizing perception and thought around shared premises, the contents of the frame communicated through a language of category systems (Bateson, 1972).

Hall (1977) presents situational frames as units for studying culture: “Situational frames are the building blocks of both individual lives and institutions” (1977, p. 140). Hall also sees frames as sequences of events, having a marked beginning, middle, and end sequence; with participants engaged in transactions toward completing culturally specific tasks. Similarities among the above authors point to the framework for this study. The following features contribute to an analysis of frames:

- Frames as sequential, with a beginning, middle, and end.
- Frames as bounded structures.
- Frames as the interaction of two or more people.
- Frames as a having clearly defined topics and speech patterns.
- Frames as having interchangeable components.

The general concern is with the use of frames as an analytic tool for studying speaking activity.

Summary of the ethnographic study proposed

Toward answering the question of how two languages occupy a single mind, an ethnographic study is proposed to describe what kinds of frames may appear in the conversation of two languages, both languages engaged in the same activity. The study is descriptive: describing what frames are present in the discourse of two languages engaged in a common activity. The frames go beyond the linguistic dimension traditionally applied to bilingualism. Frames describe how the languages intersect with the mind’s conceptual systems.
Organization of the study

This study consists of five chapters. The first chapter introduces the research topic and its means of investigation. Discussed in this chapter is a technique neglected in bilingual education research, but necessary for closing the field’s basic research gap. That approach is the ethnography of speaking, which is an anthropological methodology for conducting cross-cultural comparisons of speaking activity. The literature review is presented in the second chapter. The notion of frames parallels a century of controversy over how thought and language merge in activity. The second chapter outlines the historical events that have contributed toward and against a model of mind as situated in activity. Methodology for the study is explained in the third chapter. The chapter reports how the ethnography of speaking was applied to the conversations recorded. The results are listed in the fourth chapter. Implications for educators and directions for future research are discussed in the fifth chapter.

1 English as a second language (ESL) instruction covers a broad range of programs. Some include content-based ESL, in which academic content is included with training in English. Others include pull out ESL, in which students are removed from their mainstream classes and taught language skills for a period of time. The pull out programs resemble traditional ESL programs that focus on English language proficiency: grammar-based ESL, which teaches grammar, reading, and vocabulary skills, and communicative ESL, which teaches conversation (Crawford, 1997). Proficiency in English is the focus of any ESL program.

2 Language- minority- students (LM) are students who come from homes where a language other than English is spoken. Not all LM students necessarily require assistance with the English language. Many are proficient in English. Limited-English-proficiency students (LEP), however, do require language instruction. LEP students includes those learners whose level of English, spoken or reading, interferes with their academic performance (Crawford, 1997).