

Critical response to an article that provides evidence of sound knowledge and understanding of themes related to the teaching of Welsh in the English-medium sector.

This essay will critically respond to the article, 'Non-Native English Students Learning *in* English: Reviewing and Reflecting on the Research' (Bernardo et al., 2011), considering how the research, discussion, and recommendations relate to the teaching of Welsh in the English-medium sector and the implications that this may have. It will consider both strengths and weaknesses of the article, evaluating its overall reliability and worth. All this will be discussed in relation to relevant government documentation and other leading research in this field.

The article was written by Allan B.I. Bernardo, a Professor of Psychology at the University of Macau who has written extensively on language and cognition in bilingualism (University of Macau, 2016). The co-author of the article is Marianne Jennifer M. Gaerlan, a Doctor of applied linguistics at De La Salle University, teaching on areas such as psycholinguistics, bilingualism and bilingual education (De La Salle University, 2017). The article is a review of studies into the experiences of non-native English speakers learning in English, considered through psycholinguist and sociolinguistic approaches. The studies reviewed include the authors' own research on Filipino-English bilinguals learning mathematics through the medium of English (their second language), drawing comparisons with well supported research into learning in English across other cultures and subject disciplines. These are discussed and followed by recommendations from the authors both for other researchers in this field and for English as a second language and English as a foreign language teachers. The authors conclude that their ultimate aim in these reflections is to motivate and inspire these professionals to consider the experiences of non-native English speakers that they have put forward in their writing. The reliability of the article could be questioned by several grammatical errors, however it has been assumed that this is due to mistranslation and that this does not discredit the content. It may also be worth noting that the article does not specify the age of the bilingual learners who participated in the studies, and therefore may not be directly applicable to the primary education sector.

The article and research considered is premised on the understanding that for people in the Philippines (and many other societies who learn English as a second or foreign language), learning English is a vehicle towards achieving personal goals (Modiano, 2009). The writers note that this may be due to professional opportunities in 'an increasingly global labor market' (Bernardo et al., 2011, pp. 1), the desire to travel, or an interest in Western culture (McKay, 2002). Perhaps most notably, they highlight that in many parts of the world, schools deliver content through the medium of English, regardless of the native language of the area, as this is perceived to give greater opportunities for further education. Thus, there is significant motivation to learn English. Strubell (2001) Baker (1993) have emphasised the significant impact of motivation, particularly economic, on the learning of a second language. It is this extrinsic motivation for bilingualism that must be considered in the context of Wales if other findings and recommendations are to be applied to the teaching of Welsh in the English medium sector. Currently, it could be argued that there is significantly less motivation to learn Welsh than there is for people in the Philippines to learn English. A Welsh Government survey on Welsh language use between 2013-2015 (WG, 2015) showed that the number of people using Welsh in Wales had plateaued in the past ten years. The government have also recorded declines in Welsh language use since the early 2000s (WG, 2017). Although it is possible that this is due to other factors such as migration (Morgan, 2018; Grigg, 2015), the Welsh Government clearly recognise a lack of incentive to learn Welsh, as they have proposed a national strategy to reach 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050 which is centred around 'securing favourable circumstances' (WG, 2017, pp. 7) that make learning Welsh desirable. Baker (1993) considers that this has already been achieved in Gwynedd, in that it is considered desirable to speak both English and Welsh in most jobs, and that speaking Welsh is essential for certain jobs, such as teaching. If the Welsh Government are successful in creating greater opportunities for Welsh speakers, then it is possible that parents will place greater value on Welsh language education for their children, young people will see more benefit to learning the language and it will eventually result in positive attitudes towards learning the language across all communities. However it could be argued that creating more or better opportunities for Welsh speakers is prejudice against non-Welsh speakers and those who may naturally struggle to learn the language for various reasons. With one of the well-being goals for Wales (WG, 2015) being a 'more equal Wales', arguably

the government and other employers have a responsibility to create equal opportunities, regardless of whether people may be Welsh speakers or not.

As aforementioned, the article discusses learning in English through two different lenses; psycholinguist and sociolinguist. Through a psycholinguist approach, they compare learning and performance in mathematics tasks that engage different cognitive processes in the learner's native language with their learning and performance in English. These studies found that using English in these tasks had different effects on performance, depending on the cognitive processes involved (Bernardo, in press). Learners performed better in L1 whilst working with word problems (Bernardo, 1999) and application of conceptual knowledge (Reyes, 2000), better in L2 when problem solving (Bernardo 2001), and no effect was observed when working with abstract or computational knowledge (Reyes, 2000; Bernardo, 2005; 1998) In addition to this, research highlighted a need for consistency between the language of information given and retrieved (Bernardo, 1996; 1998). Arguably, these studies make strong case for content and language integrated learning (CLIL), 'a pedagogic approach in which language and subject area content are learnt in combination'. This approach has proved to be an effective approach for second language acquisition, and would provide an authentic context in which Welsh can be learnt and developed, a quality which is currently lacking in Welsh second language teaching. On the other hand, if Welsh education is to take the proposed direction of a Welsh language continuum, rather than Welsh first and second language education, then consideration must be given as to how this will work practically in a classroom. For example, if some tasks are performed better when the language of instruction is the first language of the student, then some children may need to carry out the task in Welsh whilst others may need instruction in English.

Another consideration that must be given is the current workforce for this. Implementing this approach to Welsh in the English medium sector would require highly skilled and adaptable bilingual teachers, who are also confident in the supporting subject. However the Welsh Government acknowledges that this is not the current workforce (WG, 2013), there is a shortage of confident Welsh-speaking teachers (Institute of Welsh Affairs, 2013) and concerns over a shortage of teachers in Wales (BBC, 2017).

Considering wider research, the article states that bilingualism shows evidence of enhanced cognitive functions (Bialystok, 2010) and the positive effect that changing from one language code to another has on divergent thinking (Baker 1999). However Storme *et al.* (2017) conclude from research that divergent thinking only improved from forced language switching if the participant more habitually switched language in everyday life. Those who were less accustomed to language switching performed stronger if they carried out the task in just one language. In relation to this, Bernardo and Gaerlan (2011) acknowledge that their study involved mainly bilingual learners with adequate levels of proficiency in English and were therefore unsure whether those less proficient would be able to consciously code switch. This would have significant implications for the article's recommendations that code-switching is modelled, discussed and encouraged, as it may not be suitable for every bilingual learner. In the context of education in Wales, teachers could, as the article suggests, use code-switching as a way of accessing these bilingual resources that the children have, however this may not be beneficial to every child and the teacher would need to know the children well enough to be able to assess what will support them in their learning.

The authors also consider code-switching from a sociolinguistic perspective. When researching social factors that influence the learning of L2, Gaerlan (2009) found family influence to be a significant factor; particularly in terms of attitudes and exposure to language at home, and whether or not student would code-switch with their families. From this perspective, they also found that bilingual learners showed a strong indication of awareness and control over their language use, based on the extent to which they perceive L1 or L2 to be useful in the specific social context. This would suggest that Wales needs to develop a culture of bilingualism; a culture which could be considered missing. There is possible evidence that there is a divide between first language Welsh and first language English speakers in Wales. For example, Welsh and English medium schools are currently often separate, universities that offer courses through the medium of both Welsh and English run them separately, and many areas in Wales are considered 'Welsh speaking' or 'English speaking'. Perhaps fuelled by oppression against the Welsh language in the past, debates around the Welsh language often side strongly to one side or the other. As the article emphasises, it should not be a case of eradicating the use of

one language, but the skilled use of both languages in conjunction with each other for varying purposes and contexts.

To conclude this essay has critically analysed the article, 'Non-Native English Students Learning *in* English: Reviewing and Reflecting on the Research' (Bernardo et al., 2011), and considered how and to what extent its findings and recommendations can be related to the teaching of Welsh in the English medium sector, considering both strengths and weaknesses. The article appears to be a credible source, drawing upon a wealth of personal research and making comparisons with further research within the field. However some limitations discussed may mean that findings and recommendations cannot be directly applied to Welsh in the English medium primary sector. If Wales is to achieve its goal of 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050 then there is a need for more incentive for the population to learn Welsh. The government is aware of this and is strategically planning for economic value on the Welsh language. It is expected that a demand for Welsh speakers will create motivation, therefore resulting in more positive attitudes towards the language which can be passed down from families to children in schools. There is a strong case for the use of CLIL in the future of Welsh second language acquisition, particularly with the proposed language continuum, however challenges of this must be taken into consideration. As well as this, there is also a limited workforce for what the government hope to implement in education. The ability to switch between languages is greatly beneficial on both a cognitive and social basis, but recommendations for the promotion of this are acknowledged as limited, as research considered included mostly proficient speakers of L2. In addition to this, it is recommended that a culture of bilingualism is grown within Wales in order to bridge gaps between first language Welsh and first language English speakers.

Word Count: 1887

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