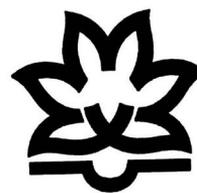




Content list available at [www.urmia.ac.ir/ijltr](http://www.urmia.ac.ir/ijltr)

*Iranian Journal  
of  
Language Teaching Research*  
(Book Review)



Urmia University

***Double Talk: Deconstructing Monolingualism in Classroom  
Second Language Learning*, Virginia Mitchell Scott, Pearson,  
Boston, USA (2010). x + 197 pp., ISBN: 978-0-205-68688-9.**

Karim Sadeghi <sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Urmia University, Iran

*Double Talk* is a monograph title in *Theory and Practice in Second Language Classroom Instruction Series* (edited by Judith Liskin-Gasparro & Manel Lacorte) intended for foreign language teaching professionals. *Double Talk* is about the language stories (from beyond the classroom context) the author has heard from multilingual people. The book purports to promote the contention that learning a foreign language is fundamental to membership of a global community in the American culture (though such a claim could have been extended to other cultures) and accordingly to enable readers as prospective teachers 'to discover the world through the lens of another language' (p. x). One of the focuses of *Double Talk* is to help the reader 'to begin to explore what it might mean to value and respect competencies beyond grammatical accuracy' (p. 25).

The theoretical framework that the book follows is 'multicompetent second language learner' which is based on de Bot's (2008) Dynamic System's Theory (DST) as well as Cook's (2007) theory of multicompetence and Larsen-Freeman's (2007) chaos/complexity theory. In addition to a Preview, the book consists of six chapters,

\* Corresponding author: Urmia University, Iran  
Email address: k.sadeghi@urmia.ac.ir

a glossary, a reference list as well as a subject index. The chapters follow more or less the same structure: Overview, Snapshot, Research perspectives, Perspectives for the classroom, Your view, Concluding propositions, Suggested readings and Researching your own language stories. Indeed, in each chapter, a language story is recounted first and relevant theoretical issues as well as pedagogical implications are discussed. There are also good explanatory notes at the end of each chapter and a glossary of key terms at the end of the book.

In the Preview, the author argues for a radical change in overarching goals of foreign language education in the US which involves ‘a fundamental rethinking of classroom language use’ (p. 2) by forcing multilingual language use to students’ lives with the understanding that monolingualism ‘is no longer a reality in the American experience’. Despite the book’s bias on ‘global’ membership, the author limits most of the discussions and claims to the American context, implicitly forcing a ‘local’ perspective.

Chapter 1, Monolingualism Can Be Cured, addresses the role of English in the foreign language classroom (where English is the L1). The reference on page 19 to Cook (2009 in press) needs revision as it is not clear whether the author is talking about a published work (which does not exist in the reference list either) or the one to be published later on. The argument the author is making about monolingualism is that with the use of different registers, even monolingual speakers use language variably and multidimensionally. Reference could also be made to using a second dialect of a language as an example of multicompetence (Siegel, 2010).

Following Herdina and Jessner’ (2002) Dynamic Model of Multilingualism (DMM) in which language is viewed as a set of subsystems, multilingualism rather than monolingualism is argued to set the foundation for second language development. The term ‘multicompetence’ is offered to replace terms like bilingual and multilingual as these latter words do not describe the ways real people use language. The claims

made across the chapter that ‘a multilingual approach... does not hold the target language in a position of special esteem’ will most probably lead to incomplete and undesirable mastery of the target language; and although the claim is that ‘multi-competence’ should be developed as an alternative to multilingualism, the problem that arises here is the development of an incompetent multicompetent L2 user who will know a little of many languages, not in a desirable way, however.

The main tent behind the book is that ‘...using English in the foreign language classroom allows students to discuss the complex issues related to language and culture in intellectually stimulating ways’ (p. 27). While the value of using L1 for promoting awareness of L2 learning in an L2 learning context cannot be neglected, the question is, with so much focus on the use of L1, when L2 learners are going to learn the target language/s to make them competent enough to act as multi-competent L2 users. Too much emphasis on the use of L1 or other target languages may render totally incompetent L2 users who know a little of everything but nothing in its full form to make them communicatively competent parties.

Chapter 2, *Regarde le Dog*, where a mix of English and French languages, shows how a 3-year old Emma effectively switched between the languages she is competent in, sets the stage for understanding bilingual functioning as well as relevant issues such as code-switching, cross-linguistic interaction, transfer and borrowing. Research on bilingualism is highlighted and implications for classroom applications are provided by linking bilingualism to the notion of multicompetence. There are some strong claims at times and it seems difficult to accept these at face value unless some sound research evidence is provided: ‘Our target-language-only approach is motivated by sound research, but it MAY also hinder our thinking’ (emphasis mine, p. 47). The case the author is making for Code -Switching in a foreign language classroom where English as L1 is to be used extensively will make the context similar to EFL classes in many cases where the use of students' L1 forces a grammar-translation approach which failed to produce competent L2 users decades ago.

Chapter 3, *I Lost My Words*, addresses the issue of language loss and acquisition in children and adults and how and why most students forget whatever they learn in foreign language classes. The chapter also discusses different L1 and L2 learning theories and brain functions as well as memory types in an attempt to account for language loss. The claims made on the need for a multicompetent L2 learner to be aware of language loss/acquisition issues seem too big without concrete evidence that such awareness is really necessary for L2 development, or what happens if such awareness is missing.

Chapter 4, *I Speak in Nouns*, focuses on the importance of words in second language use with discussions on the nature and evolution of words and grammar as well as the link between words and the brain. By promoting a lexical approach to L2 learning, the author claims that L2 learners understand the role of words and short utterances in second language development, a claim which is open to the same criticism stated above. Chapter 5, *Eat, Ate, Eaten; Go, Went, Gone*, looks at the vital role of grammar (with discussions on different meanings of grammar, approaches to teaching grammar as well as current theories about the role of grammar in L2 learning) and the limitations of focusing on grammar to develop competence in a second language. Almost all instances of L2 mentioned in the book are languages other than English, taken as L1 here. Having brought examples of EFL/ESL could have made the book targeting a much wider audience. There is a claim on page 126 (and a similar one on page 128) which seems to need a reference at least: ‘... research on FonF ... shows that guiding learners to notice a grammatical form is more likely to result in learning than when they are left on their own to make form-meaning connections?’.

Chapter 6, *I Spoke French to a Japanese Woman*, examines second language learning in light of cross-cultural approaches. The chapter proposes an ‘inverted curriculum’ (p. 159) in which the focus of FL education during the first years is fostering literacy, and grammar is postponed to more advanced levels. The chapter concludes with

criteria for assessing multicompetent L2 learners; however, no advice is offered on how to operationalize these criteria for real classroom use, nor is any empirical support provided for their adequacy. There is a statement that ‘The audiolingual method of the 1960s and 1970s focused chiefly on spoken language’ (p. 148); however, according to Richards and Schmidt (2002), the method was in common use in 1950s and 1960s.

Neglecting a few editorial problems (for example, ‘Although these functional goals of CLT served an important purpose for linking form and meaning’ has been repeated on page 129), one major problem with the book is that the title of the book, ‘Double Talk’, does not seem to be very revealing by itself. It seems that the author has tried to keep the meaning of the title ambiguous and make it look like double-talk (with hyphen, defined as ‘deliberately ambiguous talk’ (p. 4)). The claim on page 6 that *Double Talk* is an ‘ambitious project’ tackling issues such as ‘bilingual studies, the evolution of language, neurolinguistic theories, identity construction and child language acquisition’ may have indeed contributed to this divergence of scope. Furthermore, with so much emphasis on ‘multilingualism or ‘multicompetence’, one then wonders why the author has not adopted a more relevant title for the book such as ‘Multi Talk’ rather than ‘Double Talk’.

All in all, the book reviewed, with a title a bit difficult to come to terms with, illustrates a need for change in learning goals and curricula of foreign language education in the American context, promoting a literacy-based multilingual, multicultural approach to L2 learning, and provides new insights on critical thinking and awareness of non-linguistic components of L2 instruction, the notions which can be warmly received by L2/EFL education professionals inside and outside the US.

**References**

Richards, J.C., & Schmidt, R. (2002). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.). London: Longman.

Siegel, J. (2010). *Second dialect acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.