TRANSITIONING TO ENGLISH-ONLY IN A UNIVERSITY INTENSIVE ENGLISH PROGRAM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract

This qualitative research study investigated how students in university English as a Second Language (ESL) programs experience the transition to English-only methodology. When students move from English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, where the first language is usually integral to teaching and learning, to university English as a second language (ESL) programs in the U.S., they may encounter a significant difference in the approach to teaching, an approach which excludes reference to their first language and obliges them to use only English. While the question of the first language (L1) in second language teaching and learning has been explored in numerous U.S. and international contexts, there is as yet almost no published research on this issue in ESL programs in American universities. This study draws on bilingual process and bilingual product theory, which claim respectively that the first language has a place in second language learning, and that language learning is a process of becoming bilingual. The study sheds light on how students in a university intensive English program in the U.S. experience the transition to English-only teaching, adopting a phenomenological approach that allows their voices to become a part of this discourse.

Keywords: intensive English program, ESL, English-only, bilingual, code-switching
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the teaching of foreign or second languages, one of the choices faced by institutions and teachers is whether to adopt an approach that uses only the target language for teaching, or one that incorporates use of the learners’ first language (Cummins, 2007; Levine, 2011; Littlewood & Yu, 2009; Widdowson, 2003). Stern (1992) called this the intralingual-crosslingual dimension in a range of language teaching options; it is also characterized as a choice between monolingual and bilingual teaching (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; G. Cook, 2010). Intralingual or monolingual teaching is also sometimes known in English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching as English-only (Auerbach, 1993; Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Inbar-Lourie, 2010; Lucas & Katz, 1994; Şimşek, 2010). It is an approach that excludes translation and the mixing of languages, and uses only English as a reference system (Stern, 1992). A crosslingual or bilingual approach, on the other hand, may allow or encourage translation, the use of bilingual dictionaries, and use of the first language for various purposes in the classroom (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; G. Cook, 2010; Stern, 1992).

Monolingual Practices in U.S. University Intensive English Programs

University-based intensive English language programs in the United States attract thousands of international students each year (Institute of International Education, 2011). While many of these students have previously learned English in contexts in which use of the first language is tolerated or encouraged (e.g. Al-Nofaie, 2010; Ford, 2009; Kim & Petraki, 2009), in the U.S. they are likely to encounter a ban on first language use (Turnbull & Dailey O’Cain, 2009a) and monolingual instruction that is informed by the assumptions that English should be used exclusively in the classroom, translation should be avoided, and the first and second languages should be kept apart (Cummins, 2007). ESL teaching in U.S. universities is governed
by “a monolingual set of norms and ideals” (Levine, 2011, p. 4) that have pervaded language teaching for over a century (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; V. Cook, 2001; Howatt & Widdowson, 2004).

While it is not possible to make generalizations about actual language use in the many classrooms of university English language programs in the U.S., a monolingual teaching and learning approach is discernible in the published materials of many programs, particularly in the rules and guidelines of student handbooks. For example, the English Language Institute (ELI) at the University of Alabama (2012) describes its English-only policy as follows:

“English Only:” In ELI classes, we have an informal rule for English only. This means that when an ELI class starts, the teacher will teach and answer questions in English only, even if he or she knows your native language. With lower-level classes, teachers may speak more slowly and carefully than usual, to help students understand. The English Only rule also means that during class, you should try to use English only, even if some or many of your classmates also speak your language. (p. 32)

In the Welcome section of its student handbook, the Wilkes University Intensive English Program reminds new students that they are part of “a very serious and strong intensive English program” and states the expectation that they will “speak ONLY English” (Wilkes University, Student Handbook, 2012, p. 2) while on the program’s premises.

In some cases, a rationale for English-only rules is given. This rationale may be brief and unelaborated, such as, “students are expected to speak only English in the classroom for their own benefit” (University of Central Florida, Center for Multilingual and Multicultural Studies, 2010, p. 6). In other cases, a more detailed rationale is given. The American English Institute at the University of Oregon advises its students to use English only in order to maximize their
learning of English (University of Oregon, American English Institute, 2011). The English Language Institute at Texas A&M University argues in its student handbook that English-only has benefits for learning English:

Because the ELI’s goal is to develop and strengthen English language proficiency, all course discussion and student conversation in ELI classrooms will be conducted in English. Students speaking their native language in the classroom will be reminded that the use of their native language limits English practice and is not helpful to learning English. (Texas A&M University, English Language Institute, 2007, p. 9)

At some programs, the promotion of English-only is related to the benefits to learning, as well as practical concerns arising from the presence of a multilingual student population. The Virginia Tech Language and Culture Institute (VTLCI) website states, “Instructors and students both support the "English Only" policy because students who use their home languages in the VTLCI make their classmates feel isolated and uncomfortable and lose valuable opportunities to practice English” (Virginia Tech, Language and Culture Institute, 2010).

The University of Florida English Language Institute offers a similar combination of language learning and social rationales. Under the heading, “The Use of English at our Institute,” the Institute’s website states:

The English Language Institute wishes you to know that

1. in addition to the academic experience provided by the ELI, you should take advantage of every opportunity to use English;

2. using language is a social act, and as such, your choice of language is not merely personal but it affects others -- those you speak to and those who are within earshot;
3. at least in some cultures, the use of a language not understood by a person present is considered highly impolite and even insulting.

For these reasons, it is the policy of the English Language Institute that English be used in all communications among students as well as students and employees, and we assume that, by applying for admission, you accept our rule on the use of English. (University of Florida, English Language Institute, 2012)

Similarly, in its “Only English Policy,” the Missouri State University English Language Institute offers reasons for English-only that include language learning and social benefits:

Students and instructors are expected to speak only English in the classroom buildings, including the hallways and labs. Likewise, only English will be spoken at all ELI-sponsored activities outside of class. Here are some reasons you should speak only English:

1. to learn English more quickly
2. to make everyone feel comfortable
3. to make new friendships with students from different countries. (Missouri State University, English Language Institute, 2012, p. 13)

While this brief survey of English-only policies is far from exhaustive, it gives a flavor of the approach taken by many university intensive English programs to the use of English and the students’ first languages in those programs.

**Origins of the Monolingual Approach in English Language Teaching**

The monolingual approach to language teaching and learning, as embodied in the policies and practices of U.S. university English language programs, has a history based in theories of language learning and their related methodologies. Popular language teaching methodologies have largely originated in English-speaking countries, and have been disseminated by means of
teacher education programs and publications based in those countries (Holliday, 1994). In these methodologies, monolingual teaching is a widely accepted orthodoxy (Canagarajah, 1999) that has never seriously been challenged (Widdowson, 2003). For the most part, twentieth century language teaching methods have “insisted that the less the first language is used in the classroom, the better the teaching” (V. Cook, 2008, p. 180).

Monolingual methods and the resulting monolingual norms in the language classrooms of English-speaking countries can be traced back to the Reform Movement of the late 19th century, which was a reaction against the widespread grammar-translation method (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; G. Cook, 2010; Hall & Cook, 2012; Howatt & Widdowson, 2004; J. C. Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Stern, 1983). Grammar-translation was perceived to use translation of disconnected sentences to excess, and was of little use in preparing students to put the language to practical use (G. Cook, 2010; Stern, 1992). The Reform Movement encouraged teaching in the target language, but permitted reference to the learners’ first language (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). Direct method teaching, also known as the ‘natural method,’ which rose to popularity in the early 20th century (most famously by way of the Berlitz schools), was the first method that excluded the first language as a reference system and sought to have learners form ‘direct’ connections between the target language and visual aids, objects, and other words in the target language (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Howatt & Widdowson, 2004; J. C. Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Stern, 1983, 1992). Most mainstream English language teaching approaches and methods in the 20th century – notably the Audiolingual method, the Natural Approach, and Communicative Language Teaching - subsequently relied exclusively or primarily on the target language (V. Cook, 2001, 2002a; Cummins, 2007; J. C. Richards & Rodgers, 2001), with the first language used only as a last resort if at all (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009). Rationales for
monolingual teaching and the avoidance of translation included the need to use time efficiently by focusing on the foreign language; avoiding interference from the first language; and the unique nature of each language, rendering translation inadequate in providing meaning (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). Above all, language learning was conceived of as a natural process, similar to the process of a child learning a first language, in which there was no place for reference to another language (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004).

A strongly monolingual orientation to language teaching continues in the 21st century (G. Cook, 2010). The use of monolingual teaching strategies has been supported in large part not through consideration of their proven effectiveness per se, but because they were a solution to the problem of teaching students of mixed language backgrounds by native English speakers in English language classrooms in English speaking countries (G. Cook, 2002; V. Cook, 1999, 2008; Hall & Cook, 2012; Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). Monolingual teaching is also reinforced by a textbook industry based in English-speaking countries, employing native English-speaking writers, and producing English-only textbooks and other materials (Canagarajah, 1999), as well as the dominance of methodologies developed in English-speaking countries (Holliday, 1994). This combination of factors “constitutes one of the reasons behind the sanctification of, and the demand for, monolingualism in the classroom” (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009, p. 22). In recent years, however, there have been calls for reconsideration of monolingual teaching, on political, methodological, psycholinguistic, and other grounds (Auerbach, 1993; Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; G. Cook, 2010; V. Cook, 1997, 2001; Levine, 2011; Widdowson, 2003), which indicate that the issue of first and second language use is not yet settled.
Focus of the Study

In contrast to the ESL learning environments of English-speaking countries, the research literature (see Chapter 3, below) overwhelmingly points to the widespread use of the first language as a resource for teaching and learning a foreign language by teachers and students in many English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, such as English language classrooms in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey, where the teacher and students usually share a common first language (e.g. Al-Nofaie, 2010; Ghorbani, 2011; Şimşek, 2010). The purpose of the present study was to investigate the experiences of learners who have moved from this kind of context to an ESL situation in the United States and to understand whether, to what extent, and in what ways they adapt to an English-only teaching approach. How do they describe their encounter with an ESL methodology that discourages, or at least does not make use of, their first language in the second language learning process? Do they become intralingual learners, or do they continue to find recourse to their first language useful? Does the approach help or hinder their learning, and are they positively or negatively disposed toward it? As Ma argues, “Examining students’ viewpoints is important because their “consumer” views of what does and does not work for them are useful for improving teacher effectiveness” (Ma, 2012, p. 281). Hence, insights into these questions might suggest implications for effective teaching in U.S. university ESL programs.

The main research question this study sought to answer was: How do students enrolled in a U.S. university ESL program experience the transition to English-only? The study begins with an overview of recent theory that counters the prevailing intralingual orthodoxy in language teaching by advocating the inclusion of the first language as a resource for learning. The theory has been articulated in different ways by different writers. It broadly comprises on the one hand
what this study refers to as bilingual process theory, which supports limited first language use in the classroom; and on the other, bilingual product theory, which re-conceptualizes language learning as a process of becoming bilingual, or bilingualization, and advocates the use of the first language as a resource and the active and appropriate use of both languages as both a means and an outcome of learning. In the literature review that follows, bilingualism and the bilingual practice of switching between languages, or code-switching (Gardner-Chloros, 2009; Myers-Scotton, 2006), are defined and described in order to clarify concepts that arise in the research literature, and which were useful in interpreting the findings of the study. A survey of empirical studies describes the contexts and methods of prior research, and reports on their results, revealing a gap in the literature that this study addresses. The research design for the study is described, followed by the findings and implications for those involved in teaching in and administering university ESL programs in the U.S. and other English-speaking countries.

Researcher’s Position

I have learned five foreign languages to varying degrees of mastery. My language studies have included secondary and postsecondary foreign language classes, adult education classes, and independent study, in my country of origin (the UK), as well as in the country where the foreign language is spoken. In all my foreign language learning experiences, I have drawn on my own first language, English, as a support, and in most of the formal learning situations I have encountered, the use of English was included either as part of the teaching and learning methodology – such as translation and the use of bilingual dictionaries and vocabulary notebooks – or as a means to manage the classroom and its activities. When living in foreign countries, I have switched between English and the local language when talking with others who speak both languages. It has never seemed problematic to me to use my own language as a tool for learning.
Entering the English language teaching profession after I had spent several years learning foreign languages, I was struck by the widespread acceptance of the ideal of monolingual teaching in the profession. Although at first I accepted the view that immersion in the language is the best way to learn, in time I came to question this idea, since it was not congruent with my own experience as a learner, and now as a teacher. I began to ask questions such as, “How can a student learning to write in English express his/her ideas in English without the opportunity to find the words to express them using a bilingual dictionary?” “To what extent do students learning English truly understand explanations that are given entirely in English?” and “What is the effect on students of being told they must not use the language that they have used their entire life as a means of communication, thought and self-identity?” Reading the works of theorists such as Vivian Cook (V. Cook, 2001), Henry Widdowson (Widdowson, 2003), and Wolfgang Butzkamm and John Caldwell (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009), who have argued in favor of the incorporation of the first language in foreign language teaching, has ignited my interest in exploring such questions empirically.

I embark on this research not committed to a position that either monolingual or bilingual teaching is better, but simply curious about whether the lack of congruence between my own language learning experience and the monolingual orthodoxy in English language teaching is experienced by other learners. My passion is not to attempt to bolster the case for one side or the other; it is to see that the question is discussed among English language teaching professionals, and for that discussion to be informed by empirical research. My hope is that this study will be a contribution to that informed discussion.
Theoretical Framework

In recent years there have been calls for the reconsideration of the use of learners’ first language in second language teaching. It has been argued that the first language is involved in second language learning, that a new language is built on the basis of a learner’s existing language(s), and that crosslingual strategies, incorporating both languages, may be valuable in language classrooms (V. Cook, 2001, 2008; Jenkins, 2010; Levine, 2011; Stern, 1992; Widdowson, 2003). Although the discourse of ESL, including its textbooks, teacher training, and methodology, contains an implicit assumption that the learner’s task is one of gaining communicative competence in English (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009), an alternative view describes the process of language learning as one of developing skill in mediating between two or more languages and cultures, as well as being able to reflect on the world and oneself through more than one language and culture (Levine, 2011; Stern, 1992). In a 2007 report, the Modern Language Association identified these abilities as translingual and transcultural competence, and advocated them as goals of language learning (Geisler et al., 2007).

Theorists who support first language use in second language learning generally fall into one of two camps, those who on the one hand advocate judicious and limited use of the first language in teaching and learning (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; V. Cook, 2001; Littlewood & Yu, 2009; Meiring & Norman, 2002; Nation, 2003; Turnbull, 2001); and those on the other, who see the goal of language learning as bilingualism, and call for teaching methodologies that encourage bilingualism (V. Cook, 1997, 2008; S. N. Sridhar, 1994; Turnbull & Dailey O’Cain, 2009a; Widdowson, 2003). Some writers, such as V. Cook (1997, 2001, 2008), have advocated both positions. This research study uses the term ‘bilingual theory’ specifically to refer to a theory of language learning (J. C. Richards & Rodgers, 2001) that implies an approach to
teaching. Although the distinction has not been explicitly made in the literature, this study characterizes theorists who see a useful role for the first language in the *process* of learning a second language as ‘bilingual process’ theorists; and those who in addition regard bilingualism as the *product* or *result* of learning as ‘bilingual product’ theorists.

This theoretical framework has been chosen for two reasons. First, it is a recent development in second language learning and teaching theory. It has been proposed by scholars who question whether a monolingually-oriented orthodoxy in second language acquisition (SLA) research and language teaching methodology is adequate in both explaining language acquisition and in providing a teaching and research agenda (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; V. Cook, 1997, 2001, 2008; Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). It has also been proposed by those who defend the right of immigrant children, particularly those in the U.S., to maintain their home language while learning English (Auerbach, 1993; García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008; García, 2009). Examining the intralingual practices of university ESL programs in light of the theory is, therefore, timely and relevant.

The second reason for choosing bilingual theory as a theoretical framework is that it is referred to in the literature reviews of many of the empirical studies, with several (e.g. Al-Nofaie, 2010; Brooks-Lewis, 2009; de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Ma, 2009; Şimşek, 2010) drawing in particular on Auerbach’s (1993) and V. Cook’s (V. Cook, 1999, 2001) work. It is, therefore, a theoretical framework that is driving research in this area.

**Bilingual process theory: advocating judicious use of the first language.** A number of arguments have been advanced to support the view that learners’ first language has a place in second language learning. First, consistent with the pedagogical notion that new learning should be built on the learner’s existing skills and knowledge, it is argued that incorporating the first
language is a way of building on learners’ prior knowledge to optimize their learning (Cummins, 2007, 2009; Hall & Cook, 2012). Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009) have gone so far as to claim that the first language is “the greatest asset any human being brings to the task of FL (foreign language) learning and it provides an indispensable Language Acquisition Support System” (p. 66). Jenkins (2010) argued that teaching in the foreign language only prevents learners from connecting the new information in the foreign language to their own experiences, gained in their first language.

In this view, the first language has functioned as a means of conceptualizing the world and a means of communication, has provided learners with a voice, has given learners an intuitive grasp of grammar, and has functioned as a means of acquiring reading and writing skills (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009). Therefore, an effective teaching strategy involves drawing learners’ attention to similarities and differences between the first and target languages (Cummins, 2007).

Second, use of the first language may support the methodological goal of maximizing communication in the classroom. Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009) propose that permitting students to use their first language may, paradoxically, increase their output in the second language by allowing communication to continue unabated. Learners uncomfortable with attempting to communicate a complex idea in the second language may gain the confidence to make the attempt if they know they can fill in unknown language with their first language, and this may be better than avoiding speaking because of the imperative to speak only in the second language. Hence, the first language “can function as a stepping stone to scaffold more accomplished performance in the L2” (Cummins, 2007, p. 238).
Incorporating the first language in second language teaching may simply serve the practical need of comprehension. Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009) argue that a lack of comprehension is a frequent source of frustration among learners taught monolingually, because monolingual techniques for explaining meaning – such as the use of pictures, explanation in the target language, and gestures and physical movements - are inadequate. “For many phrases,” they argue, “only a clarification in the mother tongue can bring pupils to trust in a foreign-language expression” (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009, p. 75). For example, the English gloss for the expression “Don’t I know it!” in a German textbook is “I certainly know that, too.” The German equivalent, “Das brauchst du mir nicht sagen,” provides a meaning that is much closer in nuance than the English gloss (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009, p. 79). Hence, a translation or first language equivalent can be a more effective means of supporting learner comprehension than providing all explanations in the target language. Support for this clarifying role of the first language was given in the 1999 version of the British National Curriculum for modern foreign languages, which recommended target language use for most classroom purposes, but measured use of the first language for clarification and for comparing the first and target languages (Meiring & Norman, 2002). Cummins (2009) supported the use of translation for its role in promoting language awareness, as well as learners’ pride in their bilingualism.

Other justifications for first language use emphasize classroom realities: the efficiency with which meanings can be explained, and affective factors such as establishing a good relationship between the teacher and the students (G. Cook, 2010), as well as motivation, reassurance, reducing affective barriers to the second language, and the avoidance of alienation among learners (Auerbach, 1993; G. Cook, 2010; Littlewood & Yu, 2009; Meiring & Norman, 2002). G. Cook claimed that the first language will inevitably be used anyway as a teaching
and/or learning strategy in most classrooms, and that its use should be harnessed rather than discarded (G. Cook, 2010). As an example, the first language may scaffold students’ second language output, and allow them to make use of higher-order thinking skills more readily than if they are restricted to using the second language (Cummins, 2009).

The strongest argument in favor of monolingual teaching, on the other hand, is based on Krashen’s (1981) input hypothesis, which became popular in the 1980s, and argued that language acquisition results from extensive comprehensible input in the target language (G. Cook, 2010; V. Cook, 2008; J. C. Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Turnbull, 2001). Acquiring a language, in this view, is a natural biological process that occurs subconsciously in response to the provision of plentiful target language input (G. Cook, 2010). Consequently, it is argued (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009), in the classroom, target language teaching that makes the language comprehensible by means of contextual support, provides an input-rich environment for language acquisition. The approach is flawed, Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009) claim, because the second language classroom provides only a limited second language environment. That is, the narrow confines of the classroom, with access to a single second language speaker, the lack of affordances for using the language in real situations, the lack of a communicative imperative in second language classrooms where learners can fall back on the first language, the lack of emotional engagement in the second language, and the lack of time spent engaging with the second language, result in a dearth of opportunity for comprehensible input and interaction with native speakers of the second language which needs to be compensated for by “artful pedagogy” (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009, p. 30) that makes strategic use of the first language.

Although Butzkamm and Caldwell have foreign, as opposed to second language learning situations in mind, it may be no less challenging for a teacher in a U.S. ESL program to create a
rich second language environment in the classroom. However, while incorporating students’ first language is possible in EFL contexts where the students and teacher share the same first language, in the ESL classrooms of American universities it may be impractical because the teacher is unlikely to know the students’ first languages (Sampson, 2011). Additionally, because the use of a language in the classroom other than English may exclude students who do not know that language, it can be argued that the language of the classroom should be the one common language, English. With the exception of one teaching manual that includes a limited number of L1-inclusive activities in multi-language ESL contexts (Rinvolucrì & Deller, 2002) the use of techniques that incorporate the first language are generally discussed in EFL contexts only (that is, in locations where the language of wider communication is not English, and learners generally share the same language). However, if there are good reasons for incorporating the students’ first language in foreign language contexts, then at least some incorporation might be considered in second language contexts.

It should be noted that bilingual process theorists do not deny the importance of providing plentiful second language input, attempting to create a second language atmosphere, and making the target language the normal language of the classroom (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Turnbull, 2001). Scholars who take the position that the first language is a potentially useful resource in second language learning are in many cases keen to stress that they are recommending the principled and carefully considered use of the first language as a teaching strategy, rather than proposing that it be used indiscriminately (Hall & Cook, 2012; Meiring & Norman, 2002). Turnbull and Arnett’s (2002) survey of theoretical and empirical studies of teacher language use in second and foreign language classrooms found “near consensus” (p. 211) on the need to maximize target language use.
Bilingual product theory: language learning as bilingualization. Bilingual product theory goes beyond advocating judicious use of the first language. Rejecting the notion that the purpose of second and foreign language learning is limited to proficiency in the target language, some have redefined the goal of language learning as bilingualism (V. Cook, 1997, 2008; S. N. Sridhar, 1994; Turnbull & Dailey O’Cain, 2009a; Widdowson, 2003), and have claimed that teaching should reflect this purpose. That is, they propose a shift to language teaching that builds on learners’ first language and aligns with the process of bilingualization in which they are engaged. While in the mainstream English language teaching literature, learners are characterized as English language learners (ELLs), English as a second language (ESL) learners, or limited English proficient learners (LEPs), theorists of language learning as bilingualization see language learners as emergent bilinguals (García et al., 2008; García, 2009), developing bilinguals (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Levine, 2011), incipient bilinguals (Blyth, 2009; Potowski, 2009), budding bilinguals (Fuller, 2009), or aspiring bilinguals (Dailey O’Cain & Liebscher, 2009; Turnbull & Dailey O’Cain, 2009a).

The implications of bilingual product theory for second language acquisition research and teaching are profound, and could represent a paradigm shift (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009) in the way second language learning is characterized. Treating the classroom as a multilingual speech community (Blyth, 2009) or a bilingual community of practice (Dailey O’Cain & Liebscher, 2009) in which all languages known by the learners and the teacher are acknowledged and come into play (Levine, 2011), gives aspiring bilinguals practice in using language in the same way that fluent bilinguals do. The classroom then becomes a place in which the second language is used in ways which reflect the multilingual norms of the world outside the classroom (Levine, 2011), where learners’ overall language competence is acknowledged and developed,
including the ability to switch from one language to the other (code-switching), and where learner engagement with the language learning problems they are facing are addressed through activities such as translation (G. Cook, 2010; Stern, 1992).

Such a bilingual community of practice might involve raising learners’ awareness of code-switching as normal bilingual behavior, destigmatizing code-switching behavior, and promoting learners’ identification with bilinguals in the target culture as means toward a principled approach to language choice in the classroom (Levine, 2009). A bilingualization approach to language teaching and learning may be appropriate if it is kept in mind that bilingualism is the norm in the world (V. Cook, 2008; Crystal, 2010; Grosjean, 1984), that over half the world’s population is bilingual (V. Cook, 2002b; Myers-Scotton, 2006), and that if dialects are included, most people in the world may grow up bilingual (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009), leaving only “small islands of monolingualism in a multilingual sea” (Gardner-Chloros, 2009, p. 7). That is, bilingual and multilingual communication are the norm for the majority of the world’s population; monolingual communication is the exception.

In contrast, in present-day language classrooms, a monolingual approach to teaching and communication is taken for granted (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Levine, 2011; Stern, 1992), and crosslingual strategies considered “a fall from grace” (Stern, 1992, p. 293), with students’ use of their first language seen by some teachers as justification for various kinds of punishments (Canagarajah, 1999). Bilingual product theory offers an alternative lens through which to view first and second language use in the classroom, one which sees a facilitating role for the first language, and views the development of the learners’ entire language system, incorporating two or more languages, as the true goal of language learning (V. Cook, 2001, 2008).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is threefold: first, it establishes that there is an ongoing concern with first language use in language classrooms worldwide, and it locates the present study in a broad research context; second, it fleshes out the theoretical framework of the previous section by summarizing what is known about first and second language use in actual classrooms throughout the world, as well as student and teacher attitudes to their use; and third, it demonstrates that there is a gap in the research literature that the proposed study seeks to fill, and thereby provides a justification for the study.

The review is organized in the following way. It begins by defining several key concepts from sociolinguistics and the English language teaching field, which will help the non-specialist reader to understand the settings and findings of the empirical studies reviewed. It continues by describing the various ways in which first and second language use in the classroom has been researched, focusing on teacher and student use of language, and the contexts in which the topic has been addressed. Next, it summarizes the findings of the research, which fall into three categories: those that provide insight into how and why teacher and learner code-switching occurs in the classroom; those that shed light on the relative effectiveness of first and second language use in the classroom; and those that illuminate teacher and student attitudes to first and second language in the classroom. Based on these findings, an argument is made that the present study fills a significant gap in the research literature.

Definitions

Bilingualism. For the purpose of this study, Myers-Scotton’s (2006) definition of bilingualism is used: “bilingualism is the ability to use two or more languages sufficiently to carry on a limited casual conversation” (p.44). Bilingualism is not usually or necessarily defined
as equal fluency in two languages (Crystal, 2010; Myers-Scotton, 2006). Rather, it can be said to range between balanced bilingualism, wherein the speaker is fully proficient in both languages, to minimal bilingualism, in which the speaker is beginning to produce meaningful utterances in the second language (V. Cook, 1997; Crystal, 2010). Bilinguals use their languages for different purposes and in different situations (such as home and school), and balanced bilinguals – those with equal proficiency in each language in all situations – are the exception (Crystal, 2010; Grosjean, 1984; Myers-Scotton, 2006). Hence, the term bilingual is applicable to second language learners (Gardner-Chloros, 2009).

**Compound and coordinate bilingualism.** One widely accepted theory of how two or more languages are stored in the mind proposes coordinate bilingualism, wherein the meaning systems of the two languages are presumed to be stored and accessed separately in the mind, and compound bilingualism, in which the two languages are thought to be linked by one set of meanings (V. Cook, 2002b; Grosjean, 1984). While research has revealed a much more complex picture of how languages are related in the mind (De Groot, 2002), the compound-coordinate dichotomy underlies the approach taken to language choices in many language classrooms. That is, a monolingual or intralingual approach to language teaching is connected with the goal of coordinate bilingualism: success in language learning consists in keeping the two languages apart and this justifies the teaching strategy of not using the learners’ first language as a resource (V. Cook, 2001). Compound bilingualism is associated with a bilingual or crosslingual approach to teaching, involving a conscious attempt to bring the two languages together in the learner’s mind, allowing speakers to call on both languages simultaneously, and switch between languages at will (V. Cook, 2001; Stern, 1983, 1992; Widdowson, 2003).
**English as a foreign language (EFL).** EFL refers to the teaching and learning of English in a country or territory where English does not play a significant socio-political role (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). The teaching and learning of languages in English-speaking countries is also referred to as ‘foreign language teaching and learning’ in the literature review.

**English as a second language (ESL).** ESL refers to the teaching and learning of English in environments in which English plays a dominant socio-political role (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). Although the use of the term ESL has been applied to colonial and postcolonial situations (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004), in this study its use is restricted to the teaching and learning of English in countries where English is the language of wider communication, such as the USA and the UK.

**Code-switching.** Levine (2011) offers two definitions of code-switching: “Code-switching is the systematic, alternating use of two or more languages in a single utterance or conversational exchange,” and “Code-switching is the systematic use of linguistic material from two or more languages in the same sentence or conversation” (p. 50). The first definition, emphasizing switching between languages, reflects a coordinate view of bilingualism, while the second suggests drawing on a common store of language, and is more reflective of a compound view in which both languages are “simultaneously on-line” (V. Cook, 2001, p. 408).

**First language (L1) and second language (target language, L2).** The first language, also referred to in the literature as L1, is the first language acquired as a child; a second language, or L2, is any language acquired after the first language, as a child or an adult (Myers-Scotton, 2006). Target language refers to a language that is being learned intentionally.
Overview of the Empirical Studies

This section sketches out the overall territory covered by recent empirical studies of first and second language use. As indicated in these studies, the students’ first language may be incorporated to support student learning either through teacher use of the first language as a teaching strategy, or by the students themselves.

Some research has focused on teacher code-switching in the classroom. Researchers have sought to identify teacher code-switching practices and the factors that contribute to it (Crawford, 2004; de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Edstrom, 2006; Inbar-Lourie, 2010; Liu, 2010; McMillan & Turnbull, 2009; Nagy & Robertson, 2009; Polio & Duff, 1994; Schweers, 1999), the relative effectiveness of first language versus second language support given by the teacher (Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Forman, 2008; Macaro, 2009; Şimşek, 2010), and teachers’ own thoughts about their own code-switching (Anh, 2010; Chitera, 2009; Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2005; van der Meij & Zhao, 2010). The effects on teachers’ language of national policy mandating second language only in the classroom has also been studied (Cincotta-Segi, 2011; Oladipo Salami, 2008).

In contrast to these studies, a number of researchers have investigated learners’ use of the first language for second language learning. Researchers have explored the nature of learners’ code-switching and its functions (Antón & Dicamilla, 1999; Dailey O’Cain & Liebscher, 2009; Fuller, 2009; Levine, 2009; Potowski, 2009; Sampson, 2011), in some cases in relation to writing in particular (Murphy & Roca de Larios, 2010; Pappamihiel, Nishimata, & Florin, 2008; van Weijen, van den Bergh, Rijlaarsdam, & Sanders, T., 2009), and in others during pair work activities (Alegría de la Colina & del Pilar García Mayo, 2009; Scott & de la Fuente, 2008; Storch & Aldosari, 2010; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). In contrast to observable instances of code-
switching, a small number of studies have revealed learners’ use of mental translation (Yau, 2010) or self-talk in the first language (Scott & de la Fuente, 2008) while working on tasks. One study explored learners’ attitudes toward their own use of the first and second languages (Nazary, 2008). Finally, one study sought to shed light on the online code-switching behavior of students learning each other’s languages, who were communicating in writing via the Internet (Evans, 2009).

Some researchers have looked at the total environment of the classroom, and studied the use of first and target languages by both teachers and students (Al-Nofaie, 2010; Dailey O’Cain & Liebscher, 2009; Dujmovic, 2007; Kahraman, 2009; Kim & Petraki, 2009; Levine, 2003; Lucas & Katz, 1994; Ma, 2009; Nazary, 2008). Ford (2009) and McMillan and Rivers (2011) specifically framed their research around questions of principles, practices, and policy regarding teacher and student first and second language use.

**Variety of Learners and Teaching Contexts**

There has been a preponderance of research in recent years that investigates the use of first and second languages in a variety of educational contexts and with learners of differing ages and levels of second language ability. This section establishes that while research has been conducted in a wide variety of educational contexts, there is very little published research on first and second language use in U.S. university ESL programs.

Research has studied code-switching in secondary school learners of English and French as a foreign language (Evans, 2009), with elementary school students in French immersion classes in an English-speaking region of Canada (Swain & Lapkin, 2000), and with elementary and secondary level learners of English in several countries, including Saudi Arabia (Al-Nofaie, 2010), Israel (Inbar-Lourie, 2010), Taiwan (Yau, 2010), and Vietnam (Kim & Petraki, 2009).
The communication patterns and attitudes of adult learners have been studied at a language institute in Iran (Ghorbani, 2011). Children’s code-switching has been studied in dual immersion programs in the U.S. (Potowski, 2009), where Spanish and English speaking fifth graders were the subjects, and in a German and English program in Germany (Fuller, 2009). Learners in foreign language classes in English speaking countries have also been studied at the postsecondary level (Levine, 2003; Scott & de la Fuente, 2008), including students of German (Dailey O’Cain & Liebscher, 2009; Levine, 2009; Liebscher & Dailey O’Cain, 2004), Spanish (Antón & Dicamilla, 1999), and French (Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2008). Student first and second language use in postsecondary English language classes has also been investigated in Puerto Rico (Schweers, 1999), Mexico (Brooks-Lewis, 2009), Colombia (Sampson, 2011), China (Liu, 2010; Rao, 2010), the Netherlands (van Weijen et al., 2009), Spain (Alegría de la Colina & del Pilar García Mayo, 2009; Murphy & Roca de Larios, 2010), Croatia (Dujmovic, 2007), Turkey (Kahraman, 2009), Iran (Nazary, 2008), Saudi Arabia (Storch & Aldosari, 2010), Thailand (Forman, 2008), Vietnam (Anh, 2010), and Japan (Rivers, 2010). One study investigated beginning level learners of English from China, in an adult migrant English program (Ma, 2009). Finally, student code-switching in non-language college classes in English-medium education systems – in Malawi (Chitera, 2009), Ghana (Opoku-Amankwa, 2009), and Nigeria (Oladipo Salami, 2008) – has also been explored. The above-mentioned studies adopted qualitative methodology for the most part, employing data collection methods such as interviews (Ma, 2009), the recording of classes or in-class conversations (Dailey O’Cain & Liebscher, 2009; Fuller, 2009; Levine, 2009), class observations (Potowski, 2009) or a combination of these methods (Al-Nofaie, 2010).
Research on teacher attitudes to and use of the first language has likewise been carried out in a variety of contexts. Student teachers in Israel were the subject of a qualitative study of the use of the first language in English language classrooms in Arab and Jewish settings (Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2005), a study that employed the teachers’ written reflections of a lesson. University foreign language teachers’ language use has also been studied in Canada using teacher reflective journals, recorded class sessions, and student questionnaires (Edstrom, 2006), in Japan by means of interviews with teachers (Ford, 2009), and in China through the use of questionnaires yielding quantitative data about teacher and student perceptions of teacher codeswitching (van der Meij & Zhao, 2010). Primary and secondary school teachers were the subjects of studies by Crawford (2004) in Australia, Lucas and Katz (Lucas & Katz, 1994) in the U.S., and Copland and Neokleous (2011) in Cyprus. One study investigated the language choices of an elementary school teacher in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, where the students spoke a variety of minority languages but where Lao is the official language (Cincotta-Segi, 2011). These studies report regular use of the first language by teachers and students to support foreign language learning, a finding that is consistent with bilingual process theory.

Of note is the lack of research studies investigating first and second language use in a U.S. university ESL program. A single study carried out in an intensive English program in the U.S. (Pappamihiel et al., 2008), exploring the first language in invention strategies in ESL writing, was identified. In this study, adult students wrote two timed essays under two different brainstorming conditions, the first in their first language, and the second in English, and the results were compared, with no strong effects one way or the other for intermediate to advanced level students.
Explaining the Paucity of Studies in University ESL Programs

While colleges and universities have been the focus of a number of studies, the majority of these studies were carried out in a foreign language learning context (that is, where the language learned is not spoken in the surrounding environment). The preponderance of research in foreign language contexts may be attributed to the realization that the monolingual methodology developed in English speaking countries and disseminated globally is being called into question by teachers and researchers working in their own local contexts (Canagarajah, 1999; Holliday, 1994; Ouyang, 2003). This still leaves the question of why there is a paucity of studies in English language teaching contexts, such as in U.S. universities, where English is the surrounding language. A possible reason for the lack of studies in U.S. ESL programs is the taken-for-granted assumption in those programs that English-only is the only way to teach, an assumption that may be rooted in societal attitudes to bilingualism. It is likely that the United States has been home to more bilinguals than any other country (Grosjean, 1984). However, bilingualism in the U.S. has been described as short-lived, being a transitional stage from monolingualism in immigrant languages to monolingualism in English (Grosjean, 1984), and this view has been reflected in bilingual education programs that aimed to transition children from their first language to English, rather than maintain their first language while teaching them English (Crystal, 2010). This practice may be linked to the fact that in the U.S., bilingualism has traditionally been treated as low prestige, counter to the monolingual norm, and associated with alien ways of thinking and values (Grosjean, 1984). Myers-Scotton (2006) attributes such attitudes to an American ideology that “normal people speak English” (p. 403). There is also a widespread belief that the children of bilingual parents may be linguistically at risk (Crystal, 2010), and that the use of the first language by minority schoolchildren undermines their
progress in school (Cummins, 2009). Perhaps most importantly, a transitional approach to bilingualism reflects a desire to create a linguistically and culturally homogeneous society rather than a pluralistic one (Crystal, 2010). It is hard to say whether this societal antipathy toward bilingualism is an enabling factor in the disregard for bilingualism in university ESL classrooms through the imposition of English-only; Auerbach came closest to making this connection in her 1993 paper (Auerbach, 1993), in which she argued that classroom practices have ideological origins and are linked to power structures in the wider society.

In multilingual societies, different languages come to be used in different situations or domains, from the more intimate such as with family and friends, to the more formal, such as the workplace and government offices (K. K. Sridhar, 1996). In monolingual settings, bilingual individuals behave like monolinguals, rarely if ever switching languages in their speech (Grosjean, 1984). Establishing a target-language-only rule in an ESL class can be viewed as an attempt by the teacher to define the classroom as a monolingual domain and set the expectation that learners will behave like monolinguals in that environment. However, language learning is by definition a bilingual activity (Widdowson, 2003). There is, then, potentially a lack of congruence between the monolingual practices of teachers and the learners’ process of becoming bilingual (Widdowson, 2003). However, as the review of empirical studies demonstrates, little is known about this question as there is a paucity of research on English-only university ESL classes in the U.S. or other English-speaking countries, a gap that the present study addresses.

**Research Findings**

Broadly speaking, research has addressed three questions regarding first language use in foreign language teaching and learning:
1. In what ways and for what purposes do teachers and students employ code-switching for teaching and learning (e.g. Dailey O’Cain & Liebscher, 2009; Edstrom, 2006; Schweers, 1999)?

2. How effective is the use of a bilingual versus a monolingual approach to teaching and learning (e.g. Kahraman, 2009; Şimşek, 2010; Yau, 2010)?

3. What are students’ and teachers’ attitudes and beliefs toward the first language and code-switching as a teaching and learning strategy (e.g. Ford, 2009; Levine, 2003; Liu, 2010)?

This review continues with an overview of the extent and role of code-switching among bilinguals, and it establishes that code-switching is common and routine behavior among bilinguals. The review then summarizes the research findings that answer each of the above questions, and provides evidence that code-switching in foreign language classroom settings, as in the world at large, appears to be normal.

**Code-switching.** In bilingual product theory, the goal of language teaching is to produce bilingual individuals. The ability to draw on each language appropriately in discourse forms a part of that goal (Levine, 2011). For a bilingual person, code-switching is part of the “rules of use” (Gardner-Chloros, 2009, p. 180) of their language system, fulfilling certain roles and representing identities to serve communicative needs in a multilingual world (K. K. Sridhar, 1996).

Code-switching among bilinguals occurs at specific points in utterances or conversations, and serves specific functions. Hence, it is systematic, and has been categorized according to its function in conversations. For example, in situational code-switching, speakers switch languages in response to a change in situation such as the arrival of a new interlocutor or the end of a
particular activity; *metaphorical* code-switching serves stylistic or textual purposes, such as quoting a person, signaling a change in tone, or marking emphasis (K. K. Sridhar, 1996).

Code-switching may also reflect language users’ perception of the meaning of each of their languages. For example, just as a writer might switch styles to create different effects, so bilingual speakers may draw on their linguistic repertoire to communicate attitudes, intentions, and emotions (Grosjean, 1984). Code-switching can also express group solidarity as well as the speaker’s attitude to the listener (Crystal, 2010).

Code-switching occurs in all multilingual environments, “from the inner speech of bilinguals to the world stages of media and politics” (G. Cook, 2010). It occurs inter-generationally in immigrant families, in mixed-language marriages, in education and work settings in which some individuals speak a different language than the ambient one, in public spaces such as on board aircraft on international flights, and so on (G. Cook, 2010).

Interestingly, code-switching may be seen as universal language behavior that monolinguals also engage in, for example in diglossic regions – those where different varieties of the same language (such as Swiss German and Standard German) are used alternately depending on the situation (Gardner-Chloros, 2009) – or in the switch in registers or between formal and informal speech (Myers-Scotton, 2006). While monolinguals switch between different varieties of a single language, code-switching among bilinguals extends this ability to the speaker’s entire linguistic repertoire, which includes different languages (Gardner-Chloros, 2009; Grosjean, 1984; K. K. Sridhar, 1996). It can be argued, then, that code-switching between languages is more sophisticated language use than monolingual switching among styles and registers, because it integrates grammar and other language features from two different language systems, into a more complex language system (K. K. Sridhar, 1996).
Various models of code-switching seek to explain the phenomenon. Communication Accommodation Theory attempts to account for code-switching by relating it to accommodation, or the tendency of speakers to adjust their speech to others depending on whether they like or dislike them, or want to be liked by them (Myers-Scotton, 2006). Myers-Scotton’s Markedness Model accounts for code-switching as a result of speakers choosing the ‘unmarked’ or expected code in particular contexts in order to fulfill their rights and obligations vis-à-vis their interlocutors and position themselves socially in the interaction (Myers-Scotton, 2006). The Markedness Model is one form of Rational Choice Model, which sees speakers as rational actors seeking to maximize their benefits and alternate among languages as the result of a kind of cost-benefit analysis (Levine, 2011; Myers-Scotton, 2006). Finally, a discourse analysis approach to code-switching sees speakers as drawing on all their linguistic resources to achieve their goals in particular situations, influenced by big ‘D’ discourse considerations, which roughly correspond to established and expected language use in situations, and little ‘d’ discourse considerations, which are aspects of the immediate situation (Levine, 2011). Related to these models is the notion of code choice allowing speakers to enact identities (Levine, 2011; Myers-Scotton, 2006) or express group membership and solidarity (Grosjean, 1984). Similarly, code-switching can be explained by three levels of social factor: how languages are used in the wider community, including how it reflects power relations; factors connected with individual speakers, including their competence in each language, their attitudes, and perceptions of self and others; and in interactions themselves, where it may be a tool for structuring discourse (Gardner-Chloros, 2009).

These models of code-switching may be helpful in characterizing and explaining code-switching patterns in second language classrooms. Code-switching is normal (or unmarked)
behavior when bilinguals interact with other bilinguals who speak the same languages; monolingual language use is normal when bilinguals interact with monolinguals or people with whom they share a single common language (K. K. Sridhar, 1996). In the classroom then, if students with the same first language are asked to work in pairs or groups, their first language may be the unmarked code in that situation (that is, the normal language of communication for that pair or group), and the target language the marked code. Hence, they may switch from bilingual to monolingual speech when the group work ends and they are asked to address the whole class again (Levine, 2011). Students may also alternate between languages as an act of resistance to the prescriptions of authority (Canagarajah, 1999), or to an interlocutor (Gardner-Chloros, 2009) such as a teacher attempting to impose a definition the situation by means of an insistence on the target language (Kramsch, 1993).

Code-switching appears to be practiced regularly by teachers and students in foreign language classes throughout the world (G. Cook, 2010; Gardner-Chloros, 2009). For example, in an English language class in Sri Lanka, Canagarajah observed code switches by the teacher to distinguish an activity and its directions, to reassert directions or commands, and in general to establish and maintain rapport with the students; and students code-switched in order to seek help from the teacher during a role play in English, and to elicit the teacher’s sympathy (Canagarajah, 1999). Even when code-switching occurs because of a lack of competence in the target language, it nevertheless serves a variety of social and interactional purposes (Gardner-Chloros, 2009), and as students become more advanced in their target language proficiency, they simultaneously learn the symbolic values and uses of the respective languages (Canagarajah, 1999). Hence, classroom code-switching practices resemble the code-switching of bilinguals,
supporting the notion that “classroom code-switching (is) inherently linked with bilingual code-switching” (Turnbull & Dailey O’Cain, 2009b, p. 1).

While code-switching may be a useful communicative resource for bilinguals in general (Grosjean, 1984), in the language classroom it can help solve communication problems (where the teacher and other students know both languages), acting as a “conversational lubricant” that “prevent(s) the motor of the discussion from seizing up” (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009, pp. 238–239) by allowing learners to revert to their first language to overcome an obstacle before resuming in the second language. Its use may then, paradoxically, encourage a greater quantity of second language output from learners.

The antipathy of many ESL teachers toward students’ code-switching may be reflective of attitudes to code-switching in society at large, which have largely been negative (Grosjean, 1984). Code-switching has been stigmatized by monolinguals as “a grammarless mixture of the two languages, a jargon or gibberish that is an insult to the monolingual’s own rule-governed language” (Grosjean, 1984, p. 146). Many bilinguals themselves adopt such attitudes, and may try to avoid code-switching because they see it as lazy, embarrassing, or lacking purity (Grosjean, 1984). Nonetheless, code-switching between languages is a natural and normal feature of the speech of bilinguals and multilinguals (Grosjean, 1984; K. K. Sridhar, 1996; Turnbull & Dailey O’Cain, 2009b). Teaching that excludes use of the learners’ first language, such as is found in intensive English programs in universities in English-speaking countries, may, then, not be aligned with learners’ process of bilingualization (Widdowson, 2003) posited in bilingual product theory.

Functions of code-switching as a teaching strategy. A number of research studies have sought to document and explain teacher first and second language use. The research method of
these studies tends to employ classroom observation, and in some cases interviews with teachers. From the outset, it should be noted that the majority of studies found that the first language is employed by teachers in foreign language learning contexts. The teachers in these studies appear to be putting bilingual process theory into practice. That is, they use the first language judiciously in the process of language teaching, but they do not necessarily express a belief in bilingualism as the goal of language learning. It should be kept in mind that in these contexts, the teacher and students share a first language, and this makes them different from the ESL context in the present study, where the teacher is generally unfamiliar with some or all the students’ languages.

Nagy and Robertson (2009) identified three main functions of first-language use by teachers in Hungarian elementary schools: to make English more accessible to their students, which helped speed up coverage of the lesson material; for departures from the ritualized and formulaic aspects of classroom management; and to encourage good student behavior. Similarly, Inbar-Lourie’s (2010) classroom observations and interviews with elementary teachers in Arabic and Hebrew-medium schools in Israel revealed a combination of instructional, managerial, and affective reasons for using the students’ first language in teaching English.

In a survey of 581 teachers of various foreign languages in primary and secondary schools in Australia (Crawford, 2004) teachers reported making extensive use of the first language (English) in their classes, primarily for cross-cultural and cross-lingual comparisons. Here, it was the teachers’ perception of the goal of the teaching program that played a significant role in their language choice. Teachers who believed that an important goal was to promote positive attitudes and beliefs about the target culture tended to use English (i.e. the learners’ first
language) as the main language of instruction; on the other hand, those who primarily supported proficiency in the target language were more likely to make use of the foreign language in class.

Very few studies have been conducted in English as second language (ESL) environments in which students speak a variety of first languages. Lucas and Katz (1994) used observation and teacher interviews to investigate nine exemplary Special Alternative Instructional Programs in the U.S., in which pre-school, elementary, and secondary students were learning academic content in English-medium classrooms. Even though the teachers did not know some or any of the students’ first languages, the students’ first languages were nevertheless incorporated into lessons, despite the fact that the programs were “thought of as English-only programs” (Lucas & Katz, 1994, p. 542), having been established to serve students of several language backgrounds. Students of the same first language were permitted to confer with each other in that language; they also made use of bilingual dictionaries, and incorporated their first language into the writing process. The first language was found to serve a number of purposes, including giving students access to the academic content and classroom activities, enabling teachers to demonstrate respect for the students’ languages and cultures, and for social purposes such as establishing rapport (Lucas & Katz, 1994). This study is important to the present research because it demonstrates that students’ first languages can be incorporated into teaching and learning even in an ESL environment in an English-speaking country where the students and teacher do not share the same first language.

A number of studies of teacher code-switching have been conducted at the postsecondary level. Dailey O’Cain and Liebscher’s (2009) observation of language classrooms revealed that code-switching was used primarily for discourse-related functions, that is, it served to organize and manage conversations between the teacher and students, and among students. In particular, it
helped establish intersubjectivity, or a shared perspective on a task; it was used by the teacher to scaffold language tasks; and it helped avoid communication breakdown. De la Campa and Nassaji’s (2009) study of two teachers of German found two sets of rationales for using the students’ first language (English) in the classroom: the pedagogical rationale included the use of translation to facilitate student learning, while the social rationale involved using English to create a supportive and enjoyable learning environment.

In another study (Edstrom, 2006) at a Canadian university, a teacher of Spanish investigated her own classroom language choices. Edstrom discovered that she used English for grammar explanations, for classroom management, and to facilitate student comprehension. She reflected that her concern for her students as human beings sometimes overrode her concern for their language learning, but also wished to demonstrate to students the relationships between the two languages and create a favorable impression of the target culture. On the other hand, she also acknowledged that using English was sometimes because of her own laziness.

In Levine’s (2003) study, also conducted in a Canadian university, foreign language teachers used the target language most of the time. Levine described the target language as the unmarked (i.e. normal) language for textbook-based instructional activities, while the students’ first language was unmarked when talking about grammar, and for discussing tests and assignments.

Other university-based studies have found various reasons for teacher code-switching. University foreign language teachers in the U.S. used English to facilitate classroom administration, for grammatical explanations, and to build empathy and solidarity with the students (Polio & Duff, 1994). Forman (2008) analyzed teacher use of the students’ first language in university English classes in Thailand, framing his analysis with the notion of the
scaffolding of tasks, for example, by glossing new vocabulary items using a few words of Thai. This scaffolding function of the first language appeared to support student understanding and motivation, made good use of class time, and enabled familiar and natural interaction between the teacher and the students.

A small number of studies related teacher language choice to classroom-external factors. In multilingual Nigeria, there is a national policy mandating the transition from mother-tongue teaching to English by fourth grade. Nonetheless, in interviews with teachers and classroom observations, Oladipo Salami (2008) discovered that teachers employ code-switching regularly even after fourth grade, and have developed a de facto policy of bilingual instruction through their practice. A similar finding resulted from Cincotta-Segi’s (2011) study of an elementary school teacher in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic: although official policy dictated the use of Lao in the classroom, the teacher generally reserved Lao for the framing aspects of the lesson, such as giving routine instructions, but used the students’ first language, Kmhmu, for scaffolding texts and for interactions involving conceptual complexity. Here, the teacher attempted to balance external considerations – national policy governing language use – against his own conviction that using the students’ first language would support effective teaching and learning (Cincotta-Segi, 2011).

One quantitative study addressed students’ and teachers’ perceptions of the frequency of teacher code-switching in two Chinese universities (van der Meij & Zhao, 2010). Teacher codeswitching was a regular occurrence in spite of official policy against it. Teachers believed the frequency and length of their codeswitches were appropriate, but in fact severely underestimated the amount of their own codeswitching; students expressed that they wanted teachers to codeswitch – that is, use Chinese – more. As a result of the study, the researchers
claimed that the teachers and students “perceive and experience the classroom as a compound bilingual space in which there is and should be room for L2 as well as L1.” (van der Meij & Zhao, 2010, p. 406)

This summary of teachers’ use of both the first and the second language in the classroom highlights three challenges facing language teachers: the need to facilitate student learning and make language or content accessible to students; the need to manage the learning environment, for example by encouraging appropriate behavior and organizing and managing classroom conversations; and the need to attend to social and affective considerations, such as rapport building and maintaining student motivation. Consistent with bilingual process theory, the students’ first language is used as a resource in meeting all three needs where its use is permitted, or where the teacher chooses to use it in spite of policies discouraging its use (Lucas & Katz, 1994; Oladipo Salami, 2008; Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2005). It should be noted that these needs also exist in classrooms in university intensive English programs in the U.S. However, in these classrooms, the first language may not be available to be called on as a resource to meet these challenges because of the support for or policies favoring a target language-only approach to teaching (Turnbull & Dailey O’Cain, 2009a, 2009b), as is evident from the excerpts from program student handbooks in the Introduction above. Hence, students coming from learning situations that permit the use of the first language into a U.S. university ESL program are in many cases entering an environment in which these needs have to be met by means of English only, because programs adopt policies such as, “Students and instructors are expected to speak only English in the classroom buildings, including the hallways and labs [emphasis in original]” (Missouri State University, English Language Institute, 2012). Before coming to the U.S., English language learners are likely to have incorporated their first language into their English
learning. After their arrival in U.S. university ESL programs, they are discouraged from using their first language as a resource. There does not appear to be any research in the literature that addresses whether or how students adapt to this difference of approach to teaching and learning English.

**Functions of code-switching as a learning strategy.** The following studies of student language in the classroom provide some support for bilingual product theory, whereby the two languages are brought together, or compounded, in the students’ minds (Widdowson, 2003). Several studies conducted in English language classrooms in universities in EFL contexts shed light on student code-switching. Storch and Aldosari (2010) had students of differing levels of English complete form-focused and meaning-focused tasks, and recorded their interactions. Students drew on their first language, Arabic, to manage the task and in discussions of vocabulary. The most Arabic was used by lower level learners on the form-focused task, and the researchers attributed this to the difficulty of the task for these learners. Similarly, Alegria and Del Pilar García Mayo (2009) had pairs of students complete a variety of tasks in pairs using English, at a university in Spain. Students here also used their first language, Spanish, to help manage the task, providing cognitive support for themselves through metacognition, or talk about the task, and for metatalk (talk about their own speech). Task management included clarifying the task purpose and procedures, and organizing, planning, and evaluating their work. While there was an emphasis in this study on the first language used by lower level learners, Murphy and Roca de Larios (2010), studied advanced level English language students, also at a university in Spain, using a think-aloud protocol to determine how they used their first language strategically in writing tasks, in particular in finding the English vocabulary they needed to express their meanings. Students drew on Spanish for generating English vocabulary, and for
various aspects of task-management such as backtracking through their text, decision-making, metalinguistic appeals (asking themselves about the language they were using), and metacommments. Sampson (2011) recorded and analyzed short segments of classroom discourse in a Colombian English language school, and found students using the first language for several communicative and learning purposes: translation and comparing languages, metalinguage (talking about language), floor-holding, reiteration, and socializing (which included times when students were distracted from the lesson focus).

Student code-switching was also observed in university-level foreign language classrooms in English-speaking universities. In Dailey O’Cain and Liebscher’s (2009) study of German language classrooms in a Canadian university, students employed code-switching to help structure and organize their conversations, as well as to establish intersubjectivity, or a shared perspective on their in-class tasks. In another study, Liebscher and Dailey O’Cain (2004) used conversation analysis to investigate the interactions of advanced students of German. They found examples of what they categorized as discourse-related code-switching, such as the use of reformulation of a German utterance in English for emphasis or self-repair; and participant-related code-switching, wherein learners established and maintained their identity and role as bilingual speakers in a bilingual community of practice. Levine’s (2009) research involved asking two students of German in a U.S. university to complete a task in German. In completing the task, they made use of English for various discourse-related purposes: to establish identity within the task (for example by adopting the role of ‘teacher’), to build their relationship, and to help build the meaning of a text together.

Similar functions for the first language were found in Anton and Dicamilla’s (1999) study of adult learners of Spanish, in which their interactions were recorded and analyzed. The
authors described the first language, English, as a psychological tool that mediates activity on the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. That is, it helped learners reach a shared understanding of their task, and allowed them to scaffold help for each other on the one hand; and it was involved in the mediation of mental activity by means of inner speech or self-talk on the other. Scott and de la Fuente’s (2008) study, in which they analyzed conversations of English-speaking student pairs completing a form-focused, awareness-raising task in their foreign language, Spanish or French, in a U.S. university, also revealed this intrapersonal psychological function of the first language. In this case, even when students were observed to conduct the task in their second language, in stimulated recall sessions they revealed that they engaged in self-talk in English to translate, recall grammar rules, review the task, and plan what to say.

Finally, in a study that was not based in a classroom setting, but which instead analyzed the online bulletin board posts of French and English speaking secondary students learning each other’s languages, Evans (2009) found intrasentential code-switches (those occurring in mid-sentence) used for lexical support when students were having difficulty expressing themselves, and longer code-switches that were attributed to discourse considerations. In particular, Evans (2009) noted that students enjoyed playfully combining and experimenting with the two languages in their online interactions.

What these studies appear to show is that language learners tend to code-switch, or make use of their first language as a resource for learning. In most studies, learners switched to their first language to manage their tasks. For example, they talked with classmates in their first language to clarify the requirements of the task, to generate and discuss vocabulary, and to talk about the language they were using (metatalk). Some learners drew on both languages to structure their conversations, to establish a shared understanding of the task, and to establish
roles and identities for the completion of the task. Their use of code-switching is consistent with a discourse analysis interpretation of code-switching, in which speakers draw on their linguistic resources to achieve the task at hand (Levine, 2011). Even when speakers are ostensibly using one language only, they may still be engaging in self-talk in the other language to complete a task, a finding that is consistent with G. Cook’s (2010) claim that students will use their first language as a matter of course in the classroom.

More significantly, the frequency of learner code-switching reported in these studies is consistent with a view of language learning as compound bilingualization, which assumes that the two languages are coming into contact in the individual mind. Bilingual product theory argues that language teaching should work toward bringing the two languages into contact in learners, not keeping them apart (K. K. Sridhar, 1996; Widdowson, 2003) as monolingual approaches attempt to do. Widdowson (2003) argues that while the monolingual approach “practises a kind of sustained pedagogic pretence that it is dealing with only one language,…learners are busy on their own agenda of bringing the two languages together in the process of compound bilingualization” (p. 154). The widespread use of code-switching by learners, described in the above studies, appears to confirm the existence of this agenda.

In ESL classrooms where the first language is not encouraged as a resource for learning, or where it is discouraged, students are presumably expected to manage their tasks, establish shared perspectives on their tasks, complete the task, and establish roles and identities in English only. Given the apparent naturalness of code-switching in bilinguals (Gardner-Chloros, 2009; Grosjean, 1984; Myers-Scotton, 2006), this raises the question of whether such classrooms are an enriched learning environment because of the preponderance of English language input, or a
diminished one, because they exclude what appears to be an important learning resource, the first language.

The above studies are consistent with Hall and Cook’s (2012) claim that “although the mainstream literature has supported monolingual teaching for the last hundred years or so, there are many educational contexts where use of the students’ own language has remained the norm” (p. 272), and is also consistent with the fact that bilingualism is the norm in the world (Al-Nofaie, 2010; Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Chitera, 2009; Oladipo Salami, 2008; Opoku-Amankwa, 2009). Furthermore, code-switching appears to be normal behavior among learners of second languages (Turnbull & Dailey O’Cain, 2009b). Coming to the U.S. and into English-only classrooms may, then, represent a significant change in learning environment and approach for many learners, one where coordinate as opposed to compound bilingualism is encouraged. Yet we know very little about how learners adapt to this change. Do they continue to use their first language in what are ostensibly English-only classrooms (Widdowson, 2003)? Are they appreciative of the challenge offered by an English-only approach, or does it cut them off from one of their key learning resources? What are the cognitive and affective effects of English-only – are they able to learn effectively? These are some of the questions that inspired the present study.

Effectiveness of language choices in teacher talk and task design. While a relatively large number of studies, reviewed above, attempted to describe and account for code-switching behavior among teachers and students, far fewer studies have inquired into the relative effectiveness of an intralingual versus a crosslingual approach in the classroom. This may be in part because of the difficulty of setting up experimental conditions in schools. However, some researchers have made the attempt. The following studies investigated the effectiveness of
teacher and student first and second language use, and tasks in which the first language was permitted or discouraged.

Macaro (2009) described two studies conducted in English language classrooms in Chinese universities. In the first, students were asked to read under two sets of conditions: one with vocabulary glosses in Chinese (the first language), and the other with glosses in English only. There were no significant differences in vocabulary retention related to these two conditions, suggesting that neither approach was significantly more effective. In the other study reported in the same paper, students were asked to comment on the effects of the teacher’s providing glosses in English on the one hand, and Chinese on the other. Students’ responses suggested that the glosses in Chinese resulted in more intense cognitive processing, as they established relationships between words and meanings in the first language as well as the second. While this deeper processing may imply more effective learning, it was not known whether it led to greater vocabulary recall.

Several studies adopted quasi-experimental research methods to investigate the relative effectiveness of target language-only versus mixed language teaching. Şimşek’s (2010) study investigated the effect of the two conditions on the learning of English grammar concepts. English only was used in one class, while English and Turkish (the students’ first language) were used in another. The results appear to show that the students who were taught using the first language learned the grammar concepts more effectively than the English-only group, and retained the grammar for a longer period. In another study in Turkey, Kahraman (2009) was interested in exploring how the incorporation of Turkish into university English lessons affected students’ anxiety levels. One class was taught monolingually, while the other included use of the first language. Analysis of results on a classroom language anxiety scale suggested that students
who experienced classes taught in a combination of English and Turkish experienced lower anxiety than the English-only group. While direct effects on learning were not observed, the author concluded that, “raising the status of the mother tongue increases the participants’ self-esteem and makes them more confident and effective learners” (Kahraman, 2009, p. 123). Rivers’ (2010) study similarly demonstrated indirect effects on learning, in this case by measuring student satisfaction with a video production task. In this study, Japanese college students were divided into an English-only group and a group in which both languages were permitted. The ‘both languages’ group reported higher levels of satisfaction with the project, in particular because recourse to Japanese promoted student interaction and positive student relations, while several students in the English-only group, though appreciating the opportunity to speak English, reported frustration in working with their colleagues to complete the task.

Van Weijen et al. (2009) had Dutch university students write essays in English under think-aloud conditions to determine the extent of the students’ use of their first language and its effects on the quality of the resulting text. Their analysis revealed that when students used English for goal-setting, generating ideas, and structuring their essays, it appeared that there was a positive effect on text quality; when used for self-instructions and metacomments, it appeared to be negatively related to text quality. The results did not permit any firm conclusions to be drawn about causal relations between language choice and text quality. In another think-aloud study (Yau, 2010), Taiwanese high school students were asked to complete reading comprehension tests and translation tasks in order to investigate the effects of mental translation in reading Classical Chinese and English. The author reported that mental translation appeared to be positively associated with comprehension.
In the only study identified that was conducted in an intensive English program in the U.S. (Pappamihiel et al., 2008), the researchers investigated the relative effects of the first and second languages in the invention stage of timed writing tasks. Students at lower levels of English wrote higher quality essays when they brainstormed in English only, suggesting a negative effect of the first language. For students at higher levels, language choice did not make any difference in the quality of their writing under timed conditions. The authors concluded that students at the lower levels may generate ideas in their first language that they are not subsequently able to express adequately in English, hence the lower quality of their texts in the first language condition. For students at the higher levels who had a greater ability to express ideas in English, it made no difference whether they generated those ideas in their first language or in English.

The paucity of experimental studies such as these makes it impossible to draw any firm conclusions about the relative effectiveness of an intralingual versus a crosslingual strategy for teaching and learning. Hence, a claim that one strategy is more effective than the other for teaching and learning would be difficult to substantiate.

**Teachers’ attitudes toward and beliefs about the first language in teaching.** Studies have revealed a variety of teacher attitudes and beliefs vis-à-vis first and second language use in the classroom, mainly through techniques such as interviews and stimulated recall of lessons. McMillan and Turnbull (2009) studied two teachers in French immersion content-area classes in Canada, finding that one favored the use of French only, while the other was in favor of mixing English and French. Both teachers used the students’ first language regardless of their attitude and in spite of an official mandate to teach in French only. The bilingual teacher in Ma’s (2009) study of a beginning level ESL class in an adult education program in Australia recognized the
importance of using the students’ first language, Chinese, to give explanations, but also expressed concern about the students becoming too dependent on Chinese. Teachers in a secondary school in Saudi Arabia favored the use of Arabic in English classes for the purpose of clarifying meaning for lower level students, and for teaching grammar and explaining new vocabulary (Al-Nofaie, 2010). Teachers in Hong Kong favored the use of the target language, English, but were pragmatic about the use of Chinese, acknowledging its usefulness in maintaining student interest and involvement, while expressing concerns about its overuse (Carless, 2008). Most teachers in three Chinese universities where Liu (2010) conducted research held a positive attitude toward code-switching as a teaching strategy. In particular, they found it useful in giving grammar instruction, translating unknown vocabulary, for classroom management, to give students background information, and comprehension. All twelve Vietnamese teachers of English in Vietnamese universities in Anh’s (2010) study advocated the use of Vietnamese for explaining grammar and vocabulary, checking student comprehension, and for affective reasons such as reducing student stress through the use of jokes. They agreed that language choice should be related to the students’ level and strength in English, and on the type of lesson being taught. Novice teachers in Israel, asked to reflect on one lesson which they recorded and transcribed, gained a situated perspective on the appropriate incorporation of the first language into their English lessons, and found it useful for clarifying, communicating, and managing in the classroom (Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2005).

Only one study brought to light negative feelings among teachers about using the students’ first language. Three of four Cypriot teachers in Copland and Neoklous’ (2011) study used the students’ first language, Greek, extensively in English classes, for reasons such as translation and explanation. Their justifications included maintaining student interest and
motivation, saving time, and promoting a more successful classroom experience, but they also expressed feelings of guilt and were critical of their own use of the first language, which they all underreported. The authors speculated that to acknowledge their use of the first language “would be to admit incompetence, and, perhaps more damningly, would challenge their personal philosophies of teaching and learning” (Copland & Neokleous, 2011, p. 278), which were strongly influenced by monolingual teaching theory.

Studies examining native English speakers’ attitudes to the use of the first language in English language classes had mixed results. In Ford’s (2009) research in a Japanese university, he found that native English speaking teachers favored English only in the classroom, stressing the need to provide as much comprehensible input as possible, in keeping with mainstream second language acquisition theory and methodology. Only one teacher of his group of ten participants, taking a critical pedagogy stance, consciously allowed Japanese to be used in the classroom. A study of teachers in a Korean secondary school in Vietnam (Kim & Petraki, 2009) also revealed that the native English speaking teachers were in favor of an intralingual approach, whereas the Korean teachers (who also taught English) valued some incorporation of the first language, especially in reading and writing activities, and for explaining grammar and the meaning of words. On the other hand, McMillan and Rivers (2011) found that native English speaking teachers were favorable toward selective use of the students’ first language in English language classrooms in a Japanese university, contrary to the official policy promoting the use of English exclusively.

As the above studies show (Al-Nofaie, 2010; Anh, 2010; Carless, 2008; Kim & Petraki, 2009; Liu, 2010; Ma, 2009; McMillan & Turnbull, 2009; Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2005), among teachers who share their students’ first language, the use of the first language in the classroom is
widespread, and is employed for classroom management, facilitating learners’ comprehension, and for affective reasons. While some teachers embrace the first language, others attempt to use it sparingly. Native English speaking teachers appear to favor English-only teaching in EFL situations, though McMillan and Rivers’ (2011) study suggests caution in drawing this conclusion. It is important to note, though, that use of the students’ first language is common in teaching situations throughout the world, and that students coming from these situations to university ESL programs in the U.S. are likely to encounter a significantly different approach to the use of their first language.

**Students’ attitudes and beliefs about first and target language use.** This section summarizes findings of studies that investigated learners’ perceptions of and attitudes toward the use of their first language in the classroom. The attempt to understand these perceptions and attitudes is the closest research goal to that of the proposed study, and these studies are therefore of great interest, though it will be noted that none of them were conducted in a postsecondary environment in an English-speaking country.

Students appear, for the most part, to be in favor of the incorporation of their first language into second language teaching and learning. Brooks-Lewis (2009) designed an English course for Mexican university students, deliberately building Spanish into the approach, then collected students’ opinions by way of anonymous diaries and an essay. Students’ reports were overwhelmingly positive, and included favorable comments about the ease of understanding what was being said, the ability to participate in the lesson, a sense of meaning, ease of learning and the diminution of a sense of rupture between their previous learning and their new learning, as well as confidence and a sense of achievement. Students in other university-based studies commented on the pedagogical and cognitive benefits of the first language such as being able to
communicate with and understand the teacher (Ma, 2009), to understand grammar and vocabulary (Al-Nofaie, 2010; Dujmovic, 2007; Liu, 2010) or difficult concepts (Schweers, 1999) and for classroom management, introducing background information, and checking comprehension (Liu, 2010).

Two studies, conducted in universities in mainland China (Rao, 2010) and in Hong Kong (Ma, 2012) explored students’ perceptions of native English speaking teachers. Students in both studies mentioned several advantages of native English speakers, but among the disadvantages were insensitivity to the students’ linguistic problems because of lack of knowledge of their language (Rao, 2010). Students believed they would have understood better if the teacher had been able to compare English words to first-language equivalents. Students in Ma’s (2012) study appreciated that their local (i.e. Chinese-speaking) teachers were able to use Chinese to help them understand English and to facilitate communication between the teacher and the students, as well as understand the students’ difficulties. On the other hand, they felt a lack of motivation to speak English with their Chinese-speaking teachers. Attitudes to the native English-speaking teachers were mixed: while some students believed that being made to use English only in their classes led to more effective and efficient learning, and that these teachers’ classes were effective for learning pronunciation and developing listening skills, others reported that they found the teachers’ English language explanations confusing.

Students may favor first and second language use for separate purposes in the classroom. In Rolin-Ianziti and Varshney’s (2008) study of students’ views in a beginning level French class at an Australian university, most students preferred to use English for understanding and memorizing French vocabulary and grammar explanations. A majority preferred instructions to be given in the target language, French. Some students expressed concern that too much use of
English would prevent their acquisition of French. In only one study did university students overwhelmingly reject the use of their first language in the classroom. Nazary (2008) surveyed Iranian university students, who expressed a strong negative attitude toward using their first language, preferring greater exposure to English offered by intralingual teaching.

Overall, however, students in EFL situations appear to have found their first language a useful resource for understanding grammar and vocabulary, for gaining a sense of confidence, and for facilitating communication with the teacher.

**Implications**

While the results of most of the reviewed studies converge on the conclusion that teacher and student code-switching is a normal part of classroom foreign language learning, as yet there has been no attempt in the literature to unify the findings under one theoretical framework. Many of the later studies refer to the earlier ones, but as yet the findings resemble more of a patchwork than a unified field of accumulated knowledge. Situating the research in the framework of bilingual process theory (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Butzkamm, 2003; G. Cook, 2010; Meiring & Norman, 2002) and bilingual product theory (V. Cook, 2001, 2008; Turnbull & Dailey O’Cain, 2009a; Widdowson, 2003) has been an attempt to do this. The studies have revealed that in foreign language teaching situations, many teachers appear to support the use of the first language in the process of teaching and learning, consistent with bilingual process theory (e.g. de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Macaro, 2009; McMillan & Turnbull, 2009). Students in foreign language learning situations appear to switch between languages to facilitate their learning, consistent with the notion of compounding in bilingual product theory (e.g. Al-Nofaie, 2010; Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Ma, 2009). Therefore, in many foreign language teaching and
learning contexts, there appears to be congruence between the teacher’s approach and the students’ process of bilingualization.

The review of empirical studies provides a rationale and justification for the research in the present study. Of the approximately 50 research studies reviewed above, almost all took place in the past ten years. This indicates that first language use in language teaching and learning is a topic about which there is currently considerable interest. At the same time, it is also apparent that it has barely been researched at all in ESL situations (where English is taught in countries in which English is spoken), and only one study identified was carried out in a university ESL program. Perhaps this reflects the efforts of teachers in non-English speaking countries to “make sense of methodologies developed in Britain, North America or Australasia for ‘ideal’ teaching-learning situations which are very different from their own” (Holliday, 1994), and simultaneously the widespread acceptance of intralingual teaching in ESL situations. It represents, in any case, a gap in the literature, because while tentative conclusions can be drawn about the first language and code-switching in foreign language situations, and in particular in English as a foreign language contexts, none of the studies investigates learners who have moved from these contexts to ESL situations in English-speaking countries and asks about their adaptation to an English-only teaching approach. This is therefore an area that is ripe for research, given that the results of the majority of the studies tentatively lead to several conclusions about language teaching and learning.

The most significant conclusion to be drawn from the research leans toward allowing language learners recourse to their first language, or to code-switch as bilinguals do; use of both languages supports language learning rather than distracting from it (Fuller, 2009). Supporting bilingual product theory is the finding that learner code-switching in the classroom resembles
bilingual code-switching, and learners are able to conceptualize the classroom as a bilingual space in which members of a community of practice bring their linguistic resources to bear on classroom tasks and the process of becoming bilingual (Liebscher & Dailey O’Cain, 2004). Some researchers adopt a more moderate position, consistent with bilingual process theory, not encouraging but nonetheless allowing learners to use the first language on the grounds that it is a useful cognitive resource (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). There appear to be some cognitive benefits to the use of the first language. One example, resulting from Scott and de la Fuente’s (2008) research, is that when learners use two languages, the languages may work in tandem to complete a task, whereas if learners are not permitted to use their first language, the languages may compete, causing frustration and cognitive strain. Additionally, there may be affective benefits of first language use, such as reducing student anxiety and increasing their self-confidence (Kahraman, 2009), and affirming students’ first language as their primary means of expression (Schweers, 1999). The insight that both languages are necessary for second language learning may be a first step in determining what might constitute optimal use of each language in formal teaching and learning situations (Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2008).

Use of crosslingual teaching strategies can be applied in teaching situations where the teacher and students share a common language; they are less easy to use where students come from different language backgrounds (Sampson, 2011; Stern, 1992). Tolerating or encouraging first language use in classrooms with students from several language backgrounds may be seen by teachers as presenting methodological or classroom management challenges that are best solved by enforcing a second language-only rule. However, if the argument in favor of compound bilingualization is valid, then it ought to apply to learners in U.S. ESL programs. If second language learning is a process of compound bilingualization, then what measures might
teachers take to support this process even in multilingual ESL classrooms? Is it the case that multiple languages in the classroom should not be treated as the end of the conversation, but only its start?

The challenge of maximizing use of the target language in the classroom while still engaging the support of the first language can be seen as analogous to an engineering problem (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009). Cummins (2007) frames this problem as a freeing up from exclusive dependence on the target language and an opening up of opportunities for bilingual teaching strategies that encourage cross-language transfer. Levine (2011) evokes the Vygotskian notion of prolepsis, whereby the teacher provides a conceptual and intellectual space – in this case a bilingual or multilingual space - for learners to grow into and become bilinguals themselves. An embrace of this view requires seeing the classroom as a part of the multilingual world rather than as separate from it (Canagarajah, 1999; Levine, 2011). This does not require that teachers explicitly teach students to behave as bilinguals, but rather that teachers should raise awareness among learners about their development as bilinguals, and to reconsider the place of the first and second languages in the classroom, allowing a place for the former while optimizing use of the latter, and to create opportunities for learners to make principled decisions about language choice (Levine, 2011).

A challenge in attempting to implement ESL teaching along these lines is that many learners may embrace the concept of English-only, and may expect their teachers, schools, and textbooks to uphold it, even if they have difficulty living up to this ideal in practice. Learners may in fact be “among the most fervent linguistic purists” (Levine, 2011, p. 138), and they may need to be convinced of the usefulness and normalcy of code-switching. Insights into learners’
perspectives on English-only are likely to be obtained only by means of research that makes their experience its central focus.

The fact remains, however, that while much research has been conducted into teacher and student use of the first and target languages in English and other language classrooms, little is known about the way students adapt to English-only classrooms in US-based ESL programs, which attract students from many countries. Hence, the purpose of the research described below was to describe students’ experience of their transition to English-only methodology in this type of program. The increase in the number of international students entering the U.S. with university acceptances conditional on their satisfying English language requirements (Fischer, 2010), and the growing popularity of pathway programs to transition non-English speaking international students into undergraduate and graduate programs (Fischer, 2011a) make this study particularly timely.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Research Tradition and Methodology

The research question this study sought to answer was: How do students enrolled in a U.S. university ESL program experience the transition to English-only? In order to investigate this question, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) was used as the research method.

IPA belongs to the phenomenological research tradition, which is rooted in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and is concerned with the lived experience of individuals in particular situations (Creswell, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research emphasizes the researcher’s suspension of preconceived ideas, biases, and judgments about experiences in a process called bracketing, and the result of the research is a description of
the meaning attached to experiences by individuals that is as close to their experience of the phenomenon as possible, referred to as *epoche* (Creswell, 2006; Moustakas, 1994; K. Richards, 2003). The central purpose of phenomenological research is to “reveal more fully the essences and meanings of human experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 105), and the meanings people give to their experience of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2006). It is therefore, like grounded theory, an inductivist approach to research in that it does not impose existing theories or categories on the data (Smith et al., 2009). Unlike grounded theory research, it proceeds by means of a prescribed methodology: interviews with several individuals who have experienced and can provide first-person reports of a phenomenon, and an examination of the phenomenon from the various angles and perspectives of the multiple interviewees, resulting not in a theory that attempts to explain the individuals’ experiences but in a unified description of the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenon is defined as a topic or concept that is experienced by individuals, and many phenomenological studies have focused on such psychological states as grief, anger, or love (Creswell, 2006).

While IPA, in common with all phenomenological research, investigates how individuals make sense of their life experiences (Smith et al., 2009), it diverges in some ways from the approach proposed by Moustakas (1994). In that approach, known as transcendental phenomenological research, the descriptions obtained by way of interviews are reduced to a single composite description of the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). IPA, on the other hand, is part of the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition, which involves the interpretation by the researcher of the “texts” of the participants’ lived experiences (Creswell, 2006; Smith et al., 2009). IPA recognizes that the attempt to get as close as possible to the participant’s experience inevitably involves a double process of interpretation: in the first
instance by the participant in recalling and making sense of his or her experience; and then by the researcher as he or she seeks to understand the participant’s account (Smith et al., 2009). Rather than a single, composite description that emphasizes the commonalities among the experiences of individuals, which is characteristic of transcendental phenomenology, IPA researchers seek areas of both divergence and convergence among the interviewees’ individual accounts, and they call for the integration of extracts from the interviewees’ descriptions, thereby “capturing the texture and richness of each particular individual examined” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 200) rather than the essence of experience itself, which was Husserl’s concern (Smith et al., 2009). Hence another important feature of IPA is that it is idiographic, in the sense that it is concerned with the particular, with individuals’ experiences; general claims may follow an IPA study, but only after engagement with how individuals have experienced a particular phenomenon and the significance they have attached to it (Smith et al., 2009). In other words, in IPA, if the general or universal is to be grasped, it is by way of engagement with the particular

A phenomenological approach was selected because it is relevant to research that seeks “to understand more about the experience of teaching or learning a language” (emphasis in original) (K. Richards, 2003, p. 20). Because IPA seeks to understand not only the commonality of experience across individuals but also the unique experience of each individual (Smith et al., 2009), it is a useful approach for researching individuals from various national, cultural, and language backgrounds who are experiencing a shared situation, an English-only classroom in the ESL program of a U.S. university. Additionally, since IPA has been successful in giving voice to those whose voices have been unheard, marginalized, or incorrectly constructed (Smith et al., 2009), use of this research approach was intended to allow the as-yet unheard voice of students
to be heard on the question of the first language and English-only in university ESL classrooms in the U.S.

**Setting and Participants**

The research took place in the intensive English language department of a large, private urban university in the northeastern United States, and comprised two sets of semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample (Creswell, 2006) of upper-intermediate level adult ESL students who had completed secondary or postsecondary education in their own country, and who had been placed in a class in which the teacher explicitly used an intralingual teaching approach. An effort was made to select participants from differing national, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, and of both genders. Creswell expresses concern that in a phenomenological study, “(t)he more diverse the characteristics of the individuals, the more difficult it will be for the researcher to find common experiences, themes, and the overall essence of the experience for all participants” (Creswell, 2006, p. 122). Keeping in mind, however, that IPA seeks out the diversity as well as the commonality of experience across individuals (Smith et al., 2009), as well as a desire on the researcher’s part not to make a particular cultural group the subject of this study so as to maintain a focus on the experience of English-only itself, it seemed appropriate to select participants of various backgrounds who were experiencing this phenomenon in common.

Conducting a phenomenological study with ESL students poses some challenges. The students may not be able to express themselves adequately in English; or, for cultural reasons, they may be unfamiliar with the use and purpose of an interview for research. Hence students who had reached a level of English whereby they were able to comfortably express opinions about their daily lives, and who were able to understand the research rationale in English, were
selected. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that for a professional doctorate, between four and ten interviews should be conducted. They state, however, that the interviews could involve (as an example) four participants interviewed twice. A multiple interview approach is common in qualitative research in general, and in IPA in particular (Dörnyei, 2007; K. Richards, 2003; Smith et al., 2009). The two-interview approach of this study helped to ensure that participants speaking in a second language were able to articulate their thoughts and attitudes adequately, by giving them two opportunities to do so.

**Research Procedure**

Potential participants were identified by contacting teachers in the program where the study took place. Teachers were sought who use an explicitly English-only approach in their teaching (that is, they actively attempt to make English the only language of the classroom), and who were open to having their students interviewed for this study. Only teachers teaching high intermediate classes, according to the program’s level classification, were contacted. No teacher was obligated to allow the researcher access to the students. The researcher visited the classrooms of teachers who agreed to have their students participate, explained briefly and in general terms the purpose and nature of the study, and invited students to participate. The researcher handed out a recruitment flyer and a reply slip whereby students could inform the researcher of their willingness to participate in the study (see Appendix A). A $10 gift card to a local restaurant was offered to those who were selected to take part in the study. The researcher arranged brief meetings with each student, and attempted to identify appropriate individuals to participate in the study. Criteria for selection included an interest on the part of the individual to come to an understanding of the nature and meaning of the phenomenon being investigated, a willingness to be interviewed twice and for the interview to be recorded, and to have their
account published in a dissertation (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher, a former ESL instructor, also used the opportunity to determine whether the individual had sufficient command of spoken English to be able to express his or her meanings adequately.

Thirteen individuals expressed an initial interest in participating in the study. For several reasons – participant withdrawal, not satisfying the minimum age limit, and lack of an account rich enough to use for the study – the final number of participants in the study was reduced from this initial thirteen to eight.

The first interviews of the first two participants were treated by the researcher as a pilot. This pilot stage allowed the interviewer to practice his interview skills, and to determine the suitability of the questions (see Appendix B). Interview skills include general skills such as listening intensively and picking up on cues provided by the interviewee to seek deeper information, as well as techniques specific to phenomenology such as bracketing off personal perspectives and opinions in order to come as close as possible to the participant’s experience (Smith et al., 2009). Of the first two (pilot) interviews, one was rejected since it did not yield a rich account from the participant; the other was satisfactory, and was retained as part of the study, as suggested by Dörnyei (2007).

Prior to the interviews, the researcher observed a class of which each participant was a member. This helped the researcher to contextualize the interview data; contributed to a richer analysis (Smith et al., 2009); and permitted greater fine-tuning of interview questions through reference to specific incidents or activities in the class. Participants were offered a choice of locations for the interviews, but all chose to be interviewed in the researcher’s office. First interviews lasted between 35 and 45 minutes and second interviews approximately 30 minutes.
Good interviews are essential to the success of a phenomenological study (Smith et al., 2009). Consistent with the recommendation of Smith et al. (2009) an interview schedule was developed that included questions which encouraged participants to talk at length (see Appendix B), though the schedule served as the basis of a semi-structured interview (Dörnyei, 2007) in that it provided a loose framework for the interview rather than a strict, researcher-imposed agenda. Indeed, in the IPA tradition there is value in allowing the participants to diverge from the anticipated schedule in order to speak directly and freely about the phenomenon itself as they have experienced it, in order to obtain ‘rich’ data (Smith et al., 2009).

The researcher conducted the interviews, “resist(ing) the urge to interpret…while the interview is still underway” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 66), and consistent with the phenomenological practice of staying close to and grounded in the data, the researcher kept in mind the need to bracket out any preconceived notions or hypotheses, and not to take a position while conducting the interviews and analyzing the participants’ descriptions (Moustakas, 1994; Smith et al., 2009).

Analysis in IPA is characterized by processes – “moving from the particular to the shared, and from the descriptive to the interpretative” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79) – and by principles – “a commitment to an understanding of the participant’s point of view, and a psychological focus on personal meaning-making in particular contexts” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79). The researcher adhered to these processes and principles while undertaking the analysis. Following the procedure described by Smith et al. (2009) interviews were recorded and transcribed. The researcher read the transcripts repeatedly in order to become immersed in the data. An early reading was completed while listening to the recording in order that the participant’s voice be more easily evoked during subsequent readings. The initial note-taking stage was exploratory and free, and remained close to the data. It was a first attempt to identify
the way the participants talked about their experiences. Consistent with Smith et al.’s. (2009) recommendation, three types of comments were made: descriptive comments focusing on the content of what the participant said; linguistic comments focusing on the language used by the participant; and conceptual comments that were a first attempt to explore the participant’s meaning. Next, overall themes in each account were sought, by attempting to summarize what the comments attached to the account pointed to. Patterns across cases were then looked for, and a description of the experience of moving into and participating in an English-only ESL program, drawing on the participants’ reported experiences, was written, that includes both what is idiosyncratic in individual participants’ accounts and their shared characteristics. Finally, Smith et al. (2009) recommend that the researcher attempt to interpret the participants’ experiences, and indeed admonish the researcher not to produce an analysis that is simply descriptive. An attempt was made to follow this advice.

Transcripts were formatted to allow for generous note-taking on the same page. Initial note-taking took place alongside the transcript itself, with different colors used for the different types of comments. As the researcher identified themes within and across the transcripts, he used mind-mapping (Buzan & Buzan, 1996), a technique he has used for 30 years, to identify, record, and reference themes, and to identify connections among them.

**Trustworthiness of the Study**

Validity in qualitative research is established by making the research trustworthy through strategies that support the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2006). Writers on qualitative research (Creswell, 2006; Dörnyei, 2007) offer various strategies used in qualitative research which strengthen validity, including prolonged engagement with the participants and situation, contextualization and thick description, the clarifying of researcher bias, member checking, and
peer checking. While a phenomenological approach is not especially consistent with prolonged engagement with participants, interviews can be enriched by the researcher’s visiting their classroom, observing their classes, and gaining a sense of the teacher’s approach and classroom procedures and atmosphere, and how these might affect the participants’ responses. These types of strategies have been used by phenomenological researchers to enrich their data (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher visited each of the classrooms of the participating students in order to gain a sense of the context of the participants’ descriptions.

When transcripts were written, the researcher sought to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings by way of three processes, as described by Richards (2003):

- **Member validation:** Seek view of members on accuracy of data gathered, descriptions, or even interpretations
- **Constant comparison:** Keep comparing codings with other codings and classifications, looking for new relationships, properties, etc.
- **Negative evidence:** Seek out negative evidence/cases and assess their relevance to interpretations (p. 287)

The member validation included sharing the transcript of each interview with the interviewee to ensure its accuracy and that it reflects what the participant had meant to say. Additionally, when each participant’s analysis was completed, it was shared with that participant, who was asked whether the descriptions appeared to be true to their experience. The process of constant comparison took place during the coding phase. Codings from other transcripts were referred to in coding new transcripts, and where necessary, revisions were made to the coding of individual transcripts to bring consistency to the coding of all transcripts. Finally, the researcher actively sought to include all experiences in the analysis, so that experiences of embracing or rejecting...
English-only were reported proportional to their presence in the interview data. The researcher’s
target position on English-only, given in Section 1 above, was not in favor or against; rather, he was
concerned that the question should be discussed in the profession with reference to reliable
empirical data.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

In order to protect the research participants, the proposed research was submitted to the
Institutional Review Boards of the institution where the research was to take place and to
Northeastern University. An informed consent form, written in such a way that upper
intermediate ESL learners can understand, was developed. The form was reviewed by ESL
teachers of students at the upper-intermediate level to ensure that the language was at a level that
was comprehensible to the participants. The purpose of the study and the consent form were
explained to potential participants verbally. When the participants’ contributions were collected,
their names were changed in the narrative. Only the researcher had access to information
identifying the students, and this information was kept on a password-secured computer.

Each interview was recorded on a digital recording device. Immediately after each
interview, the researcher transferred the audio file to a password-protected computer, and the
data was erased from the recording device. Transcripts were stored on a password-protected
computer; hard copies were kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s home, and were
destroyed once the research was completed. All original recordings were deleted when the
research was completed.

Research involving human participants needs to address a number of ethical concerns.
These include designing the research study in such a way that it benefits not only the researcher
but also the participants in some way; communicating the purpose of the research in an honest
way to the participants; and protecting the identity of the participants (Creswell, 2009). In this study, a further concern was the fact that the researcher was an administrator in the program where the students were studying. Concerns might therefore arise that students’ contribution to the study could affect their grade in the program, either positively or negatively, or that what they said about their class or teacher could be communicated to the teacher. In order to address these concerns, the researcher clearly communicated the purpose of the research to potential participants and those who had volunteered to take part; made anonymous all contributions in transcripts; and did not communicate any of the content to any person not directly involved in the study, including the teachers, before the study had been completed. The researcher offered to present the findings of the research to the participants in a live session for those still in the program, or by electronic means for those who have left the program, so that the participants could learn about others’ encounter with English-only. This may have benefitted them by placing their own experience into the context of the experience of others in the same situation. Although an employee of the program where the study took place, the researcher did not have any input into individual student evaluations, which are determined by the teacher alone. The program itself is a non-credit program, and grades are not given.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to shed light on a topic that, while an ongoing subject of discussion in other parts of the world and in many foreign language teaching situations in the U.S., appears to have been little researched in university ESL programs in the U.S. and other English-speaking countries. The findings could validate the English-only approach if students reported that they had accepted it and learned in a way that is consistent with it; or the findings could challenge the approach if it were revealed that what is ostensibly an English-only
classroom in fact involves considerable use of the students’ first language, in a variety of ways from bilingual dictionary use and self-talk to interaction with peers. The findings might, alternatively, neither affirm nor challenge the approach, but simply give insights into the ways that students experience it. If there is value in the notion that learning is effective when teaching and learning styles are aligned, then the research could have implications for the way ESL classes are taught in U.S. university ESL programs.

Chapter 4: Report of the Research Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to investigate the experiences of English language learners who have recently moved from their country to a university ESL program in the United States in which an English-only teaching approach is used, and to understand whether and how they adapted to this English-only teaching approach. Specifically, the research attempted to answer the question: How do students enrolled in a U.S. university ESL program experience the transition to English-only?

To investigate this question, the researcher conducted two in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each of eight students from five countries, which yielded 265 pages of transcript. The following table gives an overview of the participants, listed in the order in which they were interviewed. All names have been changed in accordance with the procedures described in the section titled Protection of Human Subjects.
Smith et al. (2009) recommend that for a multiple-participant phenomenological study, super-ordinate themes that emerge from multiple readings of each participant’s transcript should be presented in turn, drawing on the accounts of several participants as evidence to support the theme. This chapter is therefore divided into two main sections. First, a brief profile of each participant is given. The profiles were created solely by drawing on the interview data, and are intended firstly to demonstrate the differences and commonalities among the participants’ backgrounds, and secondly to provide some context for the participants’ accounts of their experiences. Each participant checked and confirmed his or her profile for accuracy. Following the profiles, an analysis of the participants’ experiences of transitioning to English-only follows, organized by superordinate theme. In the commentary, the university English program where the participants now study is referred to as the Intensive English Program or IEP. Direct quotes by the participants were transcribed verbatim, and have in some cases been modified slightly where this necessary for clarity.
Participant Profiles

Ghaliah. Ghaliah, aged 23, came to the U.S. from Saudi Arabia on the King Abdullah Scholarship Program to study for a master’s degree. This is her first semester in the intensive English program. Uniquely among the participants, she has had extensive experience in an English-taught college program in her own country, and only joined the intensive English program at her sister’s urging to fill in some time and refine her English until her master’s program begins. She currently lives in an apartment with her sister, who has recently completed a master’s degree program in teaching English to speakers of other languages. Ghaliah comes from a highly educated family, several members of which speak fluent English. Her father is a surgeon who has lived in the U.S. and visits regularly, and both parents are supportive of Ghaliah’s efforts to learn English and continue her education.

Fengqi. Fengqi started learning English in junior school in Shanghai, China, at the age of ten. She graduated from college with an undergraduate degree in Japanese, then worked for a Japanese company in Shanghai for two years, after which she came to the U.S. Her motives for coming to the U.S. were to join her boyfriend, who is studying for a PhD (and with whom she now shares an apartment), and because she felt she needed a change after spending her whole life in Shanghai. Now aged 25, Fengqi is in her second semester of the intensive English program, and she is planning to apply for entry to a master’s degree program.

Jiwon. Jiwon, aged 24, began studying English in third grade in Korea, and for a few years during elementary school attended an afterschool program in a private English school, where he encountered native English speaking teachers. He earned his bachelor’s degree in Animal Biotechnology, in a program in which much of the content was delivered in English, by Korean and foreign instructors, using English language textbooks. Uncertain of what to do in the
future, Jiwon came to the U.S. gain new experiences and to improve his English, and in particular to gain a higher score on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), a popular measure of English proficiency in South Korea. Prior to joining the Intensive English Program, where he is in his first semester, Jiwon spent one semester at a similar program in Texas.

**Sabina.** Sabina learned English starting in a city elementary school in Kazakhstan, and ending in university. Before coming to the U.S. on the Bolashak International Scholarship fifteen years later, Sabina spent two months in an English language program to strengthen her English skills. She came to the U.S. to improve her English language skills because she travels professionally and has difficulty communicating because of her lack of English. However, if the scholarship had not specified that participants have to study in a foreign country, Sabina might have preferred to stay in Kazakhstan and study English there. Sabina considers Russian, which she learned and used in school, to be her first language, and Kazakh, the language of her family, to be her “mother language.” Sabina is in her mid-30s, and this is her third semester at the intensive English program. She shares an apartment with two roommates, one a fellow Kazakh who speaks Russian, the other an American whom she rarely sees.

**Zhanar.** Growing up speaking Kazakh and Russian in a village in Kazakhstan, Zhanar studied English for six years, starting at the age of twelve, and ending in her first year of university. In her subsequent work as a government employee engaged in work with international partners, she found her English skills to be inadequate and this led to a concern about her chances of promotion. In her mid-30s, she applied for and was awarded the Bolashak International Scholarship to study English in the U.S. for four semesters. Before leaving for the U.S., Zhanar took a one-month English language course, where her teacher was Korean. This is
Zhanar’s fourth semester in the Intensive English Program. During her stay in the U.S. she is living in an apartment with her husband and daughter.

**Kanat.** Kanat came to the study of English later in life than the other participants. A speaker of Kazakh, which he regards as his first language, and Russian, in which he completed his education, he studied German rather than English in school, and it was only during his employment in the government that he came to realize that he needed English in order to communicate with foreign visitors. He studied English for one month in Malaysia, and took two short trips to the UK, where he immersed himself in English by living in the home of his English teacher. Subsequently, he spent three months in the U.S. working on an advanced degree on a sociolinguistic theme, and has since attended several conferences in the U.S. Now 28, he is in the U.S. on the Bolashak International Scholarship, and this is his fourth semester in the intensive English program. He is conducting research at a nearby university while continuing to work on his English. He shares an apartment with other Kazakh students.

**Laila.** Beginning her English studies at the age of eight in Saudi Arabia, Laila went on to study for a bachelor’s degree in Computer Science, where the materials were in English and classes were taught in a combination of Arabic and English. Laila worked in a computer training center, but dreamed of studying for a master’s degree in the U.S. She successfully applied to the King Abdullah Scholarship Program for a scholarship to study in the U.S., and while she and her husband waited for her husband’s U.S. visa, attended the Alfaisal International Academy in Riyadh for six months, where she studied English with American teachers. Now in her mid-twenties, Laila is in the U.S. with her husband, also a student at the Intensive English Program, and her daughter, who attends a local daycare center. Both Laila and her husband are hoping to
enter master’s degree programs once they have attained the required TOEFL score. This is Laila’s second semester in the Intensive English Program.

Valeria. Now in her late twenties, Valeria began learning English in school at the age of twelve, and went on to study for a bachelor’s degree in dentistry. Aspiring to earn a master’s degree in dentistry in the U.S., Valeria attended a U.S. proprietary English school nearby for one year while she worked on her basic English skills and became more confident in English, then joined the Intensive English Program this semester. From the beginning of her stay in the U.S., Valeria has lived with an English-speaking host family, where, of necessity, she speaks only English.

Findings: Themes in Transitioning to English-Only

Smith et al. (2009) describe interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a research method that brings to light both the convergent and divergent aspects of individuals’ lived experiences. The participant profiles above offer a first insight into the fact that although each participant is experiencing the transition to English only, each one comes from a different background and has a unique set of experiences. They are from a variety of countries and speak different languages; they vary in age, marital status, and living situation, and have differing types and levels of motivation. Additionally, each has encountered English learning in a unique way (including a variety of prior experiences with English only) that gives a distinct flavor to the way in which they experience the transition. The emergent themes are present in each of their accounts, but are experienced in sometimes similar and sometimes divergent ways. Hence, the name of each theme does not refer to a particular experience, but to a category of experience within which each participant’s individual experience was unique. The themes are described
briefly in the following table, followed by a more extensive description supported by illustrations from selected participants’ accounts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior experiences learning English</td>
<td>Participants’ accounts of how they learned English before coming to the intensive English program, with an emphasis on their feelings about those experiences and reflection on their effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective response to English-only</td>
<td>What it feels like to be in an English-only classroom, including participants’ metaphors describing the experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of L1 and English: internally</td>
<td>How participants describe their thinking process while in the English-only classroom, in particular ‘thinking in L1’ or ‘thinking in English.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of L1 and English: to support learning</td>
<td>Participants’ use of their own language and/or English to support their learning of English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of L1 and English: with others</td>
<td>Practices and attitudes toward using the L1 or English to communicate with others who speak the same language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life factors affecting English-only</td>
<td>How individual backgrounds, motivations, and living situations make the experience of English-only unique for each participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embrace or rejection of English-only</td>
<td>How participants have come to view English-only as either a useful or inappropriate means of learning English.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Prior experiences learning English.** Most of the participants began learning English between the ages of eight and twelve in the state systems of their respective countries. They mostly have a somewhat negative evaluation of their experiences in these education systems, which emphasized knowledge of English – typically grammar and vocabulary – but did not prepare students to communicate in English. However, beyond their elementary and secondary education, the participants have had a variety of encounters with English, including English-only, in their own country and others, before coming to the United States.
Jiwon is a typical example. English classes in Korea focused on reading and grammar, but very little on speaking and listening skills, an emphasis that he believes accounts for Koreans’ strong skills in reading and writing, but a lack of ability to speak English fluently. While his teacher encouraged the students to listen to English every day in order to practice, there was little chance to develop listening skills in the classroom, where Jiwon’s teacher spoke only Korean. What little speaking practice there was comprised of students memorizing and reciting textbook dialogues in pairs. His brief attendance at an after-school English program with native English-speaking teachers around the age of twelve left him feeling lost and frustrated.

Jiwon learned vocabulary through the memorization of vocabulary lists provided by the teacher. To memorize the words, Jiwon would simply “write, write, write” (Jiwon, p. 6), and typical vocabulary tests comprised ten words in English with the requirement to write the translation in Korean. Jiwon says he took many such quizzes. The vocabulary he memorized then is helpful now when he is reading, but does not help him with speaking and listening.

This approach to teaching and learning English is, in Jiwon’s view, a reflection of an education system that is focused only on preparing students to enter the next educational level — from middle school to high school, and from high school to university. Competitive testing in English, math, and science, is used to assign students to their place in the hierarchy of educational institutions. Since the English tests comprise mainly grammar and reading, teachers focus on these areas, neglecting communication skills. Jiwon’s assessment of his English learning in middle and high school is that:

It was not helpful to me. My middle school is three year, and high school is three year. I’ve learned English totally almost six years or seven years, when I was a student, but it was very hard to speak English and listening, until now. It was not helpful. Korean
English system is only focused on entering to the university, so it’s not helpful. (Jiwon, p. 7)

Similarly, Fengqi sees her English language education in China as a reflection of a system geared to preparing students for extremely difficult university entrance tests. Although she had occasional lessons with a visiting foreign teacher, lessons she found “very relaxed,” (Fengqi, p. 8), the most important thing for high school students was to enter a good university, and students spent most of their time in class completing reading, listening, writing, and grammar exercises. Fengqi’s teachers spoke English extensively in the classroom – around 70% of the time – although explanations of grammar and the meanings of words and sentences were in Chinese. High school textbooks gave English explanations, but the students tended to ignore them and take notes in Chinese. Speaking practice was limited to the memorization of a text and subsequent recitation before the teacher, or structured in-class dialogue for display purposes by pairs of students chosen in turn by the teacher. As a result, Fengqi says, many Chinese students’ spoken English is not very good, though she finds their grammar to be better than those of students from other countries. The most important thing she and many Chinese students learned is how to pass tests, without developing practical skills beyond test-taking. In contrast to middle school and high school English, Fengqi found her English classes in college to be very relaxing. With no more pressure to pass a test to enter a good university, there was no more grammar, and once-a-week lessons taught by Chinese PhD students focused on reading and understanding texts.

Laila’s early experiences of learning English in Saudi Arabia were extremely negative for her. She hated English, the teacher who taught her for several years, and the teacher’s approach, which was “awful” (Laila, p. 1) and “boring” (Laila, p. 2). The emphasis was on grammar, and
Laila remembers dictation, and spelling quizzes that required only memorization. The students and teacher spoke only Arabic in class. Laila claims that she did not even realize English was a language, or that it might be helpful to her in the future. For her, English facts were similar to math facts, something to be memorized. Laila felt that English was difficult, something she could not learn. She blames her teacher: she and her friends all hated English, she says, because of the teacher, who used poor methods.

A turning point came for Laila when she attended the Alfaisal International Academy in Riyadh several years later, her first experience of English-only teaching. At first, she was very shy to speak, but because classes involved a good deal of speaking, she gained confidence. “It’s the place that make me love English,” Laila says, “because the teachers were native from America” (Laila, p. 1).

Sabina also experienced a heavily grammar and reading based approach to English, though she understands the purpose of learning English to have been primarily the development of cultural knowledge among students, in contrast to the test-taking goals experienced by Jiwon and Fengqi. In the state schools where she studied in Kazakhstan, English classes were one or two hours per week, and a textbook-based grammar and translation approach was taken. The teachers used only Russian in the classroom, and textbooks contained explanations in Russian or Kazakh. The students spoke English only to answer the exercises out loud. The topics included:

typical topics of family, English family, about capitals…I think that’s all. Yes, so nothing involved real life, nothing involved relationships between people. (Sabina, p. 24)

Following high school, Sabina unexpectedly found herself accepted to a prestigious college. Here, the teachers spoke Kazakh, Russian, and English in class, and followed a methodology prescribed by the Ministry of Education. The students generally spoke Russian because it was
comfortable for them, and attempted to speak English only when asked to do so by the teacher. Sabina felt that her classmates were more highly educated than she, and that their English was stronger, so “I feel some confused and trouble with understanding at that time” (Sabina, p. 7). Sabina did not find English especially enjoyable.

In contrast to these participants, Kanat’s prior experience with English did not include the state education system, since he studied German rather than English in school in Kazakhstan. Frustrated with his inability to use English with international visitors in the workplace, Kanat traveled to Malaysia for a one-month English language program, where he learned basic words and phrases. A linguist himself, he was convinced that to fully learn a language he would need to immerse himself in English-speaking culture, and he next traveled to the UK for two weeks, where he stayed in the home of a teacher who gave him daily lessons. He completely isolated himself from his culture and other speakers of Russian and Kazakh during this time. In spite of his low level of English, Kanat explains that somehow he and his teacher understood each other, and that he was able to understand everything. Kanat and his teacher connected on an emotional level. Originally from India, his teacher had recently volunteered to teach poor children in India:

And during our conversation I understood everything what she told me, and she cried sometimes, because you know in this period, there was movie about millionaire, who win, won many Oscars like this. And she show me some pictures of Indian children because they was so poor, they study in no comfortable conditions, like this. And she cried, and I understood, and I supported and it was very great. (Kanat, p. 3)

During these experiences, and Kanat’s subsequent three-month visit to the U.S. to work on an advanced degree, Kanat picked up English in a piecemeal way. His stories reveal an adventurous spirit, a person willing to throw himself wholeheartedly into challenging
experiences. His prior experiences with English stand in stark contrast to those of the other participants, but reveal the very different backgrounds students may bring to their encounter with English-only in a U.S. university English language program.

Most participants in the study, including the ones not mentioned above, began their English studies in elementary schools that focused on grammar, vocabulary, and reading, and involved the use of the first language in the classroom and much translation. Three participants appear not to have encountered English-only teaching before their arrival in the U.S.: Sabina and Zhanar from Kazakhstan, and Valeria from Venezuela. On the other hand, several of the participants’ accounts reveal that students’ transition to English-only does not necessarily begin when they come to an ESL program in the U.S. Several of the participants experienced some teaching with a native English speaking teacher who did not speak their language. Jiwon’s first (and unsuccessful) encounter with English-only was at the age of twelve, while Laila and Fengqi had both been in classes with native English speaking teachers. Kanat encountered English-only by means of his self-motivated adventures, and Ghaliah undertook undergraduate studies in Saudi Arabia with English-speaking teachers. Nonetheless, all the participants continue to be engaged in the transition to English-only, as is demonstrated in the following sections.

**Affective response to English-only.** This theme centers on the feelings of the participants about their transition to an English-only learning environment. For some participants, the description concerns their current experience in an English-only class. For others, the experience of several months (or in Ghaliah’s case, several years) ago is recalled. Most participants experienced some form of discomfort on encountering English-only, and some continue to do so.
Students new to English-only may experience discomfort arising from the exertion involved in communicating in an English-only environment. When Valeria arrived in the U.S. from Venezuela, she recalls that her high school grammar-focused English did not prepare her to communicate in English, and as a result she could barely express herself. She stayed with a host family, where she could understand virtually nothing of what was said to her. Her lack of ability to communicate led to a sense of isolation and was a difficult time for her emotionally:

I felt terrible. Sometimes I felt frustrated and then I wanted to go home and forget everything about English because it was a really hard time for me. Because how I told you, I couldn’t understand anything and also I couldn’t communicate very well, so it’s terrible. It’s terrible feeling, you know, when you cannot communicate with the people that are around you. (Valeria, p. 23)

Valeria’s recollections of this time create an image of a person reduced at times to an infant-like state. Unable to explain to the host family what she liked to eat, Valeria simply ate what she was given, and left what she did not like. She could not be herself, and was incapable of successful adult social interaction. Valeria recalls that she would sometimes cry all night and get up in the morning with swollen eyes from crying, but continued to attend school and work hard. With help from her supportive host family, Valeria was eventually able to overcome her difficulties and thrive in the English-only environment.

When Ghalia entered a preparation program for an English-speaking college in Saudi Arabia, in which all in-class and out-of-class communication was in English, she was extremely resistant. She was at first gripped by a sense that the English-only environment was overwhelming, and that succeeding in this environment was too great a task for her. She recalls telling her mother each day that she did not want to go to the college. English as a means of
communication was so unfamiliar to her that she felt as though everyone was “speaking Chinese” (Ghaliah, p. 1). She also had a sense that the other students were more proficient in English than she was: she filled numerous vocabulary notebooks with lists of words, while her classmates barely wrote in theirs, and she relied heavily on Google Translate to understand class texts. She remembers this as a time of great suffering, a time for which her previous English education – comprising extensive memorization of grammar rules – had not prepared her.

At first, she resisted, and tried to use Arabic with native Arabic-speaking teachers. In one incident in which she asked to go to the restroom in Arabic, the teacher refused to speak with her or let her leave the room until she asked in English. Initially upset and affronted, Ghaliah finally yielded and made the request in English. In another upsetting incident, Ghaliah was reading aloud in class, and some of her classmates laughed at her pronunciation. During this time, Ghaliah says that she felt a passion to become like those around her, to become a fluent English speaker and reader. At the same time, she felt as though she were in a prison. She said to her mother at that time, “You brought me to a hell” (Ghaliah, p. 8). Ghaliah eventually overcame her initial negative feelings and resistance. Her current experience in the Intensive English Program is described in the last part of this section.

Jiwon, on the other hand, is currently experiencing the difficulties of adapting to the English-only classroom. He describes his classroom experience in the Intensive English Program as a struggle to comprehend the English of his teacher and of media such as video recordings used in class, and to communicate successfully. When he first began attending an English program in Texas, he found it difficult to understand both native English speakers and the speech of his classmates from various countries. Even now, he finds listening hard, and understands only 80% of what the teacher says. Although he appears fully engaged and at ease in class, in
reality, when he does not understand something his teacher says, he often pretends to be relaxed, and feigns comprehension, saying, “‘Oh, okay, okay,’” just like an actor” (Jiwon, p. 16). At times however, when he feels strange or uncomfortable because of a lack of comprehension, his face reveals his true feelings, and at those times he is likely to tell the teacher that he does not understand. Jiwon describes his experience watching an excerpt from a sitcom in a recent media-based class:

Some people understood when they watch sitcom, but it was very hard for me to understand. Even though the scene is very funny, I couldn’t smile or I couldn’t laugh. I felt frustrated. Even though I stayed four months in United States, my hearing is so bad until now. “What should I do?” I thought…I wanted to run away. I wanted to go out in my class because I thought it wasted my time. I don’t understand, so I thought, “Why I have to be here now? (Jiwon, p. 18)

Reminded of the word ‘alienation’ that his class had learned recently, Jiwon felt that this word accurately described his feeling while watching the sitcom.

Oral production is a significant part of English-only classrooms in the U.S., and students are expected to participate in class by speaking with the teacher and with each other. Jiwon, however, has difficulty expressing himself in class. He had prepared for class on the day of the first interview by reviewing and memorizing a lot of vocabulary, but was unable to use the vocabulary because the meanings he had found by translating into Korean did not seem to correspond to his teacher’s explanation of the words. Frustrated and exasperated, he was not able to participate in class. Furthermore, Jiwon finds himself constrained by being unable to detach himself from grammar rules while speaking. Constantly monitoring his speech for correct grammar, he is unable to engage in free talk. He contrasts himself with his Arabic-speaking
classmates, who, he says, “don’t keep grammar” (Jiwon, p. 24), but nevertheless speak English fluently and naturally.

Jiwon’s strategy for performing in this situation is to plan his communication by making a story in pictures in his mind. By explaining each picture in turn, a process he refers to as “draw(ing) my image” (Jiwon, p. 27) or “tak(ing) off my idea in my brain” (Jiwon, p. 28) he is able to speak. When he is unable to create a picture story in his mind, however, he finds it impossible to speak beyond everyday phrases. In grammar classes, Jiwon is easily able to create mental pictures and describe them in the process of speaking. In reading classes, with the same teacher and classmates, he is often unable to generate ideas and create mental pictures, and finds himself “blocked”:

Even though I try to be my best in that class, but I can’t. I couldn’t. I think just something blocked my English. Even though I tried, I want to say that, but just blocked, something blocked me. (Jiwon, p. 28)

Jiwon is therefore currently engaged in a daily struggle to listen and speak in his English-only classes, one that puzzles and frustrates him as he tries to cope with lack of understanding and an inability to communicate spontaneously. When he feels he is learning and understands what the teacher is saying, he feels excited and happy. When he does not understand, he feels alienated and uncomfortable.

Like Jiwon, Fengqi understands approximately 80% of what her teachers say. However, in contrast to Jiwon, she is positive about understanding 80%, and is pleased that she can understand the main ideas in her teacher’s speech. She attributes her lack of understanding to her own mind wandering: occasionally wrapped up in her own thoughts, she misses something and loses the thread of what her teacher is saying. This lack of understanding causes Fengqi some
stress, and although she will sometimes ask the teacher for clarification, she believes that doing so often will make the teacher uncomfortable. Therefore, she says, “I just let it pass” (Fengqi, p. 20), conveying an attitude of acquiescence: lack of understanding is a part of the process of coming to understand. In contrast to Jiwon’s pretense at understanding that conceals an intense feeling of struggle, Fengqi’s ‘letting it pass’ reflects a calm and positive acceptance of her difficulties:

I think everyone faces this problem. So I don’t want to be stressed, stressful. I told myself, “Don’t worry, take it easy. Maybe you will know next time, just listen carefully. Try to do some exercise, you will be better. (Fengqi, p. 30)

Classes in the intensive English program are mostly made up of students of diverse nationalities and languages. Sabina’s struggle to communicate in the English-only classroom reflects in large part a concern with a lack of personal connections and the attempt to maintain a sense of dignity while speaking what she considers to be incorrect English. Contrasting her class in the Intensive English Program with classes back home in Kazakhstan, she observes that the students in the class are an assortment of people who are not friends, and do not have a close relationship with each other. They are individuals who find themselves thrown together because of their goal of learning English. What is significant about this situation for Sabina is that in contrast to classes in Kazakhstan, here the students have different styles of English, and nothing in common with each other, and all of this inhibits their ability and willingness to communicate. Sabina believes that students learning English are ashamed to talk with each other, thinking that their English is not of a sufficient level for meaningful interactions. For her, classmates do not provide an opportunity to practice speaking; they are simply people in the same room, learning English. As a result, the experience of the English-only classroom is largely one of her own
silence and isolation. Although she wants to speak English, she is reluctant to do so because she feels her grammar is incorrect. Speaking correctly is a matter of maintaining her self-esteem:

I don’t want to look silly, not educated, so I’m trying to create good answers, and of course I understand that my trying is not good if I don’t know good structure, good grammar, so I keep silent…If I was speaking just short sentence, with about yes, no, it is not good for conversation, so I’m keeping silent. (Sabina, p. 32)

Moreover, Sabina believes she is not an exception: she thinks this is how many other students feel. As a result of the lack of connection with her classmates and her perceived inability to communicate, Sabina describes being in an English-only classroom as being like “inside the glass” (Sabina, p. 31): you can see all that happens, and even participate, but you are still trapped inside your own glass.

To return to Ghaliah’s account: having overcome her early resistance to English-only in Saudi Arabia, and having developed into a fluent English speaker, she now struggles in a different way in the Intensive English Program. English-only has become second nature to her, but she has outgrown the formal English classroom. She describes a profound sense of boredom, an unwillingness to listen to any more grammar explanations, a lack of engagement with the formal learning process. She feels trapped inside the classroom, wants to break out and continue learning English by using it in naturalistic situations – by watching TV, listening to music, and interacting with people in the city. For Ghaliah, English-only in the classroom has become an irrelevance, something she has gone beyond: she is now so comfortable in English that she wishes to immerse herself in the language through daily living.

This section on the participants’ affective response to English-only has described the transition as one involving struggle of various kinds: a sense of isolation and helplessness
resulting from the inability to communicate, resistance to English-only and a sense of being overwhelmed, a daily struggle to understand and express oneself, the inability to connect with international classmates and silence arising from one’s reluctance to speak incorrect English. Yet not all participants reported that the transition to English-only was a struggle. Laila hated English in school, but after graduating from high school, she developed a love of English through watching American sitcoms and attending an English-only program in Saudi Arabia. Her account does not contain any significant descriptions of a struggle to adapt to English-only. Likewise, Zhanar does not express strong feelings about the transition to English-only, and Kanat, the linguist, appears to have embraced it in his spirit of adventure and openness to the new.

**Use of L1 and English: internally.** This section is the first of three that report on participants’ accounts of their use of the first language and English during English-only classes and in their daily lives. Although teachers establish that the language of the classroom is English, and encourage students to use English as much as possible, most of the participants carry on their lives in both (or all) their languages to a great or lesser extent. In this first category of experience, participants comment on the languages ‘inside their head’ as they study and live in an environment surrounded by English.

Ghaliah, in her early days of English-only, found herself mentally translating English words into Arabic to help her understand, and she formulated answers to questions in Arabic before translating them mentally into English. In the first level of her English-only program in Saudi Arabia, her teacher told the class to learn to think in English and to forget Arabic. She advised them to express their feelings in English, and relate ideas in their heads using English. Mixing English with Arabic, she told them, would only give them a headache. Ghaliah came to embrace this advice, and these days, she says, “whenever I go anywhere to speak to anyone, I
speak in English and I think in English, and I write in English. I don’t use Arabic at all here” (Ghaliah, p. 15). Ghaliah recalls that one of her teachers in college told her that she would know she was advanced in English when she started to dream in English, and speak in English in her dreams. Ghaliah says that nowadays she speaks English in her dreams, and this is how she knows she has advanced to a high level.

For Valeria, learning English involves a conscious effort – she calls it a strategy – to think in English. In writing, she has learned that if she translates her thoughts from Spanish to English, the results are not successful, because, she says, the meaning changes or she does not express herself in a satisfactory way. On the other hand, when she speaks English, she says that most of the time she thinks in English, but when she cannot find a way to say something – “maybe I don’t know how to make the sentence or I don’t remember the specific word in English” (Valeria, p. 21) – she mentally translates from Spanish into English. This helps her to express herself, but she sometimes finds that people look at her as though she is not making sense to them. Valeria makes an effort to keep thinking in English even outside the classroom, because, she says, if she spends much time thinking in Spanish, she feels her speaking in English is terrible.

Jiwon recalls being given the advice by his teachers in Texas not to translate from Korean into English, but to think only in English. While he thinks it is good advice, he finds it difficult to adapt to: “I’m 24 years old. I’m not young. I’m not preschooler. It is hard for me to accept only English” (Jiwon, p. 15). When he uses simple English for routines such as greetings, Jiwon is able to speak without thinking of Korean. On the other hand, when he wishes to express his feelings or give specific information, he usually formulates sentences in Korean before speaking.
For Zhanar, the advancement of her English skills may be accompanied by an increased ability to think directly in English. She states that when writing she used to think in her own language, then write. Now that her English has improved, she thinks in English before writing. It is in the first interview for this study that Zhanar first seems to realize that this change has taken place in the current semester: “I’ve discovered at this moment that I begin to think in English, and put it to paper” (Zhanar, p. 14). Nonetheless, Zhanar states that even if she is interested in English, it is natural for her to think in her own language, and, she says, all her feelings are in her own language, in which she says she feels most comfortable.

If the idea of thinking in English is accepted or at least an aspiration for most of the participants, for Sabina it is inconceivable that she or anyone else could think in a foreign language. After the topic was raised in the first interview, she spoke with friends who, she says, have studied in the U.S. for many years. According to Sabina, all her friends said that nobody thinks in English. Her classmates in the intensive English program agreed, and asked who had suggested it. Sabina expresses her skepticism thus:

Even advanced level, they said, “Yes, we’re thinking in my own language, but, for example, writing in another language, yes, of course, but thinking always in my language”…Who said it? Is it the result of research? (Sabina, p. 25)

Indeed, when writing, Sabina appears to formulate her thoughts in Russian first, then render them in English. Specifically, she says that she constructs the main ideas and descriptions in Russian prior to writing, and adds some details directly in English as she writes. In speaking, too, Sabina claims to be formulating in Russian before speaking in English. She believes that every speaker of a foreign language uses this strategy. It is the only strategy she knows for writing and
speaking since, she says, she cannot rebuild or restructure her brain. She cannot think in English, and believes it would be impossible even if she were fluent in English.

**Use of L1 and English: to support learning.** Although university English language programs promote an English-only teaching approach, students themselves may rely on their first language in various ways to support their learning, particularly in the use of bilingual dictionaries to research or check the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. There are many English-only dictionaries specifically for English learners on the market, and although some teachers strongly encourage the use of these dictionaries rather than bilingual ones in which students can check the meaning in their own language, several of the participants in the study spoke about relying on their first language to research or check word meanings.

Understanding new vocabulary in an English-only classroom can be a challenge for students. Teachers may explain the meaning of new words to students, but students may still need to refer to a dictionary for clarification. Jiwon tries to use an English-only dictionary – one in which the definitions are given in English. However, it may still be difficult to understand the meaning of a word, and at those times he refers to his English-Korean dictionary. Kanat tries to use an English-only dictionary, because he believes that the definition and examples it presents give him a good opportunity to gain an understanding of the language. However, the definitions in English often contain unknown words, and it can take time to obtain the definition of a word. This dictionary is not useful if he is pressed for time, and most of the time he uses his English-Russian dictionary. Zhanar has a similar experience using her English-only dictionary:

I should translate, because how can I learn if I don’t translate…By using the Oxford dictionary, maybe it’s possible to study, to learn new words also, but all this gets so long time to understand the meaning by this Oxford dictionary. (Zhanar, p. 15)
Zhanar believes the English-Russian dictionary helps her to understand the exact meaning of words. Yet she also believes she should stop using this dictionary and study English by means of English-only.

Fengqi, who says she is trying to think in English but thinks mostly in Chinese in her English classes, sometimes has difficulty understanding the teacher’s explanations of new vocabulary:

Sometimes teacher will give us the English meaning, but sometimes you can’t know the English meaning…You don’t know the words and you also can’t know the explanations.

At that time, I will look up for it in my (English-Chinese) dictionary. (Fengqi, p. 22)

She has found that she learns vocabulary best when she memorizes both the meaning in Chinese, and the English explanation. In her vocabulary notebook, she often writes the definitions in both English and Chinese, finding the English explanation alone too difficult. Nonetheless, she aspires to follow her teacher’s advice and write down the meanings only in English.

While most of the participants report using or having used their first language to support their learning in English-only classrooms, Valeria makes every effort to exclude Spanish from her learning, consistent with her commitment to thinking in English. She uses an English-only dictionary, because she believes it will help her to learn more vocabulary. If she does not understand a word in a definition, she looks that word up too, and this means that she is constantly learning “one more word, one more word” (Valeria, p. 11).

In general, however, the participants in this study, who are all placed in an upper-intermediate level class, tend to rely on their first language to support their studies, particularly for checking and noting the meaning of new vocabulary.
Use of L1 and English: with others. Many students in university English language programs find themselves in classes not only with students of different languages, but also with students who share a first language. Even if they are not in class with students of the same language, they may meet such students in the public areas of the program, during breaks, for example. Others encounter speakers of the same language outside the program, for example in their living situation. Students are therefore in the position of needing to decide which language to use when speaking with others who share a first language. All the participants in this study spoke about this choice, and reported various ways of handling it.

Fengqi sometimes speaks with her Chinese classmates during the breaks between classes, to discuss topics of interest such as news from China or social matters. Although the teachers ask students to speak only English, the language they tend to use with each other is Chinese, because, Fengqi says, it is very difficult to explain something if the language is not your mother tongue. Though she sometimes initiates conversation with Chinese friends in English – friends whose English, she says is very good – they sometimes laugh at her in an affectionate way, and tell her that her words are naïve. As they are her friends, this does not bother her. Fengqi believes that coming to the U.S. can be a fast way to learn English, but only if you use English in your life, for example by encountering English in the supermarket, or by having an American roommate. Her roommate is her Chinese boyfriend, and although he speaks English well, they never speak in English together, because of the difficulty of explaining details in English. “You know,” Fengqi says, “mother language is much easy. Much powerful.” (Fengqi, p. 17)

In the classroom, Fengqi says, she always speaks English. Kanat and Zhanar, on the other hand, will sometimes speak Kazakh or Russian in class with classmates from their country, particularly to help with the comprehension of words or questions. Zhanar believes classes would
be more effective if they did not share classes with students who spoke their language, and says that she cannot improve her speaking skills because of the presence of other Kazakhs in the class. Though the teacher advises the students to speak only English, she and her Kazakh classmates continue to speak to each other in Kazakh or Russian, particularly when the teacher is out of the room or her back is turned. She explains this behavior, saying “maybe we prefer our first language” (p. 22). She believes it is a human quality to want to find the easiest way to understand new information, and the first language is a means for doing that. She also attributes her disinclination to reach out to others and speak English to her age, the fact that she is married and has her family with her, and a more general reluctance to go out and speak with other people. She seems to find security in her own languages and with people from her country.

Both Zhanar and Kanat do make some effort to speak English even with fellow speakers of Kazakh and Russian, for example at dinner in their apartments (they live with other Kazakhs). For Zhanar, this is ineffective, since they speak for ten minutes then revert to Kazakh or Russian. Kanat is more positive about these efforts, but still believes that he cannot live for an extended period using English only. He will always seek out speakers of his own languages, because he feels the need to be able to communicate freely:

I understand that if I just speak English it will be good for me. But another side of this point, I can’t because I tried to do it in Wisconsin but, I tried to find some Kazakh or some Russian who speaking my language, to speak. I need because actually I’m communicable person and I need to speak…if I can live one month it’s okay for me in American family, but not more, not more, because I need some Kazakh or some, I don’t know, I don’t know why. (Kanat, p. 17)
This need for relief from English and the imperative to speak the first language is shared by other participants. Jiwon agrees with the English-only policy of the intensive English program. He says he does not want to meet Koreans or speak Korean because he is here only to improve his English. He would advise fellow Koreans studying in the U.S. not to make Korean friends, and to make an effort to speak English. In practice, he needs to speak Korean from time to time. His explanation speaks to the need for relief from English, and, in common with Fengqi’s use of Chinese, hints at the difficulty of expressing detailed or nuanced meanings in English:

Sometimes I got a lot of stress from English, so sometimes I want to speak Korean with Korean guys or girls to relieve my stress. I want to say a lot, but it is very hard. It is very hard to express my feeling or what I want to say. English is so simple but Korean is so complicated. I think it is very hard. (Jiwon, p. 13)

Valeria, in spite of a strong determination not to mix with Spanish speakers or use Spanish in class – she has lived with an English-speaking host family for the entire duration of her stay in the U.S. – will still speak Spanish when she meets Spanish speakers outside the classroom. Her explanation is consistent with that of the other participants:

Because I feel strange if I speak with the person in English. I don’t know. I feel that I will not communicate the same how I will do in Spanish, so I feel more confident, and I prefer to speak Spanish…Sometimes I feel ridiculous if I’m speaking in English with a Spanish speaker. (Valeria, p. 14)

However, she attempts to avoid Spanish speakers whenever possible, and in class, if she is placed into a discussion group that has another Spanish speaker, she will try to change groups.
She has also agreed with the one other Spanish speaker in her class that they will not speak Spanish with each other.

**Life factors affecting English-only.** In their interviews, participants shared information about their lives prior to and outside of the immediate environment of the English-only classroom, as well as the attitudes and motivations they bring to this learning situation. These ‘life factors’ appear to influence how effectively the participants make use of the opportunity to learn English in the Intensive English Program and while living in an English-speaking country.

A theme that emerged strongly from the interviews with Sabina was her disinclination to study combined with a strong attachment to her own culture and language. Sabina originally felt she needed to improve her English because her government job in Kazakhstan brings her into contact with professionals from other countries. When she travels, she says, she feels like an animal, a dog that listens but does not speak, and wants to change this feeling. She wants to be fluent in English and to have effective communication skills. She applied for the government’s Bolashak Scholarship to study abroad, and was surprised to be awarded it. She came to the U.S. because it was a condition of the scholarship, but she would have preferred to stay home in Kazakhstan for her studies, and thinks this would have been more effective for her. She says she doesn’t like to study because she is too old, and claims to have made little progress during her eight months in the program.

Before coming to the U.S., she expected to have opportunities to speak with native speakers of English. However, she feels that she lacks these opportunities, because her classmates are non-native English-speakers who speak to each other in poor English, and because her English education in Kazakhstan did not familiarize her with informal English for everyday interaction outside the classroom. Because she thinks her English is bad, she does not
try to communicate outside the classroom. Moreover, she lives with a Kazakh roommate, with whom she does not speak English, and relies heavily on Russian workbooks and dictionaries to support her learning. For these reasons, Sabina’s experience is far from the English-only learning envisaged by the intensive English program.

In contrast, Ghaliah’s strong motivation to succeed in an English-only environment came as a result of encouragement from her family. Initially defiant about using English when she entered an English-only program in Saudi Arabia, Ghaliah received an enormous amount of support from members of family. Her sisters, cousins, uncles, and father already spoke English well, and helped her by speaking English with her all the time. American TV was available in the home, and Ghaliah watched CNN and sitcoms, which gradually became easier for her to understand. Ghaliah’s mother supported and encouraged her with thoughts of creating a better life for herself than she had had:

My mom doesn’t know how to speak English very well but she supported me. She always used to tell me, “Ghaliah, I want you to be better than me. I want you to be in a better place. I want you to be the best daughter in the world. I want everyone to talk about you. Please, keep going.” (Ghaliah, p. 8)

In spite of Ghaliah’s protestations about the English-only college, her parents continued to encourage her. On her mother’s advice, she spent her whole days in college surrounded by English, forcing herself to communicate in English. Today she attributes her success to the encouragement of her parents. During her stay in the U.S., Ghaliah is living in an apartment with her sister, who encourages her to speak English even at home, and insists on their watching American, not Arabic-language TV, in order to continue practicing.
Jiwon’s motivation for learning in the U.S. is in large part a product of a competitive Korean market for jobs and status that requires individuals to attain a high score on the TOEIC test, a test of English for the workplace. Jiwon frequently refers to his jealousy at not being able to attain a high score in spite of long study and repeated attempts at the test, while others around him succeed. In the past, he invested the same time as his classmates in learning English, but did not see an improvement in his own English. His feeling of jealousy motivates him to continue studying, in spite of the struggle described above, but it can also make him feel nervous and stressed. Combined with his jealousy, however, Jiwon was excited to come to the U.S. and try out his English, and he continues to be motivated by making friends from other countries and seeing improvements in his English.

Both Laila and Valeria demonstrate a positive attitude, a clear goal, and a commitment to learning, all of which appear to support their success in English-only programs. Neither was enthusiastic about English in elementary and secondary school, but both have immersed themselves fully into English study. Valeria is motivated by, even fixated on, the goal of earning her master’s degree in dentistry in the U.S.:

I have a very clear goal, so I’m a person that I don’t like to give up very easily. If I have a dream and I can do it, so I try to do it and I try to do my best. I don’t like to give up easily, because this is life, you know. (Valeria, p. 28)

Consistent with her positive attitude, Valeria learns English with a passion in order to get closer to her goal. She lives with an English-speaking family, and welcomes their corrections of her English; studies independently, far beyond what is required by her classes; and makes a conscious effort to exclude Spanish from her thoughts. She keeps her goal in mind, even on days when she feels like giving up.
Laila’s passion to study English as an adult was ignited when she attended an English-only language program in Saudi Arabia, and began watching American TV shows such as ‘Friends.’ Where she had previously hated English, she now found beauty in the language. More profoundly, Laila had recovered from a life-threatening illness, a transformative experience for her. She recalls lying in hospital, feeling bad because she did not understand the words of the medical staff, who all spoke in English. She thought long about her life, her job, and her dream of studying abroad:

When you feel very sick and you feel you will lose everything and you promise yourself nothing will upset you after you get better and healthy, you will do whatever you want… God gave me this, gave me my health back to do something in my life. I started to think about my life more. You know in Saudi Arabia I will just get married and have children and have a simple life like my mother. It’s wonderful, but what happened if I get divorced? I will be nothing. It’s bad to live through someone else, what happen if my husband died? I could come back to my parents’ house and they will take care of me. I will be in a very bad, in a bad situation. I think I have a very good major, a very good GPA. I can pursue my education. So after I get better, I do it and I get the scholarship very fast and it was very good for me. (Laila, p. 26)

Laila passionately pursues her dream of attending a master’s program in Computer Science in the U.S. Although she speaks Arabic with her husband and daughter, she tends to avoid the company of other Arabic speakers, but has friends from other countries with whom she speaks English frequently. She takes the TOEFL test regularly to try and achieve the required score: “I will take the TOEFL a million times until I get the score that the university need” (Laila, p. 16), she says. Laila has the additional motivation of a time-limited scholarship, which gives her a year and a
half to complete her English studies before moving into a degree-granting program, a goal she is confident she will achieve.

This section has illustrated some of the various motivations, attitudes, and life situations that students bring to the English-only classroom. It illustrates a spectrum of attitudes toward undertaking the experience of English-only in an English-speaking country, from reluctance or indifference to an embrace of American culture and the process of English-only learning, and demonstrates that while English-only is an approach to teaching and an official policy in many university English programs, in reality it may be perceived and acted upon in very different ways by students, depending on factors in their backgrounds, their attitudes and motivations, and their living situations, and the decisions they make about how to work, live, and socialize in an English-only environment.

**Embrace or rejection of English-only.** The final theme focuses on the participants’ view of English-only as an approach to teaching and learning English. While most participants embrace the approach, some express disappointment.

Sabina had expected that when she came to the United States to study English, she would have the opportunity to improve her English by practicing with native English speakers. In fact, most of her interactions are with non-native English-speaking classmates from a variety of countries. These interactions with students at her level do not, she feels, help her to improve. She feels more confident after several months in the program, especially in listening and speaking, but any improvements she has made she attributes to watching American movies and news, and listening to her teachers. She feels that explanations of language in English-only are inadequate. She says she would benefit from being able to compare features of English with her own language, and hearing explanations in her language. Sabina appears to believe that learning
English in an “English language atmosphere” (Sabina, p. 310) is in principle a good idea, but she does not seem to have found that atmosphere in the Intensive English Program and in her life in the U.S.

Zhanar expresses a similar view. The classroom is the most significant place where she encounters English, but even here, the idea of an English language environment generated by interaction in English with other students of different language backgrounds is not realized. She has not been able to make friends outside the classroom, and she and her colleagues do not meet regularly with conversation partners organized by the Intensive English Program. While Zhanar’s living situation – she goes home each evening to take care of her family – no doubt affects her opportunities for social interaction with English speakers, she believes her lack of interaction with others may be because of her age (she is older than the average student in the program) or her personal qualities:

I don’t like to go out and speak with other people. Maybe I’m afraid. I don’t know. At the same time, maybe it depends on my age…My friends, they don’t go out, too. They still don’t have native speaker friends…Even if they have maybe some meetings with conversation partners, they refused their meetings sometimes. I can see that they refused their meetings, canceled their meetings. It depends. Maybe they get tired during study and they want to sleep after class. (Zhanar, p. 13)

Zhanar believes that studying in an English-only environment could be useful for her for a short time, but is not useful over a long period. Other than in writing, she does not believe she has made significant progress in her English. Finally, she believes that the cultural differences between U.S. teachers and Kazakh students may be too great to allow for clear communication and mutual understanding, and the teachers’ lack of knowledge of the students’ language
background results in teaching that fails to address the individual students’ needs. She recommends that the program employ some Russian-speaking teachers, so that the students can explain exactly what they want.

Reflecting on his brief experiences of living in his English teacher’s home in the UK, in which he completely cut himself off from his home country and languages, Kanat is positive. He was able to make an emotional connection with his teacher, even with just a small amount of language, and did not feel the need to speak Russian or Kazakh. He favors the English-only rule in his classroom in the Intensive English Program for three reasons: it is respectful of the teacher to speak in English, it helps improve his English, and it is polite to the other students in the class, who may not understand what is being talked about if the language used is other than English. However, Kanat has not been able to immerse himself in English in the U.S. as he did in the UK, in part because he speaks Russian or Kazakh when he goes home. Further, Kanat echoes a concern of Sabina’s that the other students in the program speak a variety of languages, and speak English in a variety of non-standard ways. For Kanat, the term English-only does not reflect the reality he experiences:

It’s absolutely not reality, because you know why? Because it’s not a real class, because it’s people from different country, they have some own language. I have my own language, they have own language, and they are like me, they don’t understand. They ask, and they have problems pronunciation... But if I were in Americans’ class, just native Americans (sic), it’s another situation. I think after three or four class, I speak English like English, and I’m thinking like English. This situation’s different. (Kanat, p. 17)
Hence, while Kanat embraces English-only in principle, he does not perceive it as having been realized in the Intensive English Program. For him, being surrounded by English-speaking Americans and having no reliance on his first language are the conditions required for a true English-only experience.

For Ghalia, who says that she learned English in college in Saudi Arabia because her teachers forced her to speak in English, the resistance that she felt at the time and the stress it caused her have resulted in very impressive spoken English fluency, and a perception on her part of strong reading ability:

I noticed the difference when I entered (the Intensive English Program). I’m like very genius girl who understand everything, who can read everything, and when I hold this paper, I can explain what’s inside it and I can give you a preview of what it is about. I started like to…in Arabic we skimmed through the pages and we can tell what it is about. I start to skim in English, I’m like, “Oh, Ghalia, that’s genius.” (Ghalia, p. 9)

Although Ghalia has ‘outgrown the classroom,’ feels bored, and wants to continue her English learning out in the world, this does not negate her positive feelings about English-only as an effective approach for teaching and learning.

Similarly, Valeria, Laila, Fengqi, and Jiwon have embraced English-only as a means to improve their English. Valeria undertook her English studies in the U.S. with the expectation that everybody would speak English, that she would have no choice but to do the same, and would not have the opportunity to speak in Spanish. She believes her teachers are right to ask students to use only English, because this is the best way to practice and learn. Consistent with this belief, Valeria has arranged her entire lifestyle around immersion in English, by living with a host family, listening to English language music on her music player (and researching the lyrics when
she doesn’t understand them), and above all avoiding speaking Spanish. Her overall assessment of English only:

Yes, it’s good because you are in an atmosphere where you…everybody speak in English, so you can learn how they…the way how they speak, and also their intonation and their pronunciation. (Valeria, p. 16)

Laila recently advised her sister to follow the path she had followed: study at the Alfaisal Academy in Riyadh, where the teachers are native English speakers who cannot speak Arabic; watch English movies and shows; and write in English. This approach, she says, will work if her sister has the passion to do it. English-only has been successful for Laila because she uses every opportunity to practice, avoids thinking in Arabic, and actively tries to think in English, for example by mentally telling herself stories in English.

Fengqi also believes that English-only is effective:

Because if the teacher just use English, we can improve many skills, for example listening, listen to native English speakers. Because we listen, so we can talk more fluently, correctly. (Fengqi, p. 29)

Finally, even as he continues to struggle with English, Jiwon remains convinced that English-only is an effective way to learn. His advice to others is simple and positive:

Don’t make friends who is from same country. You should try to speak English. Even though you’re not good at speaking English, just try. Jump in is very good way to learn English quickly. (Jiwon, p. 19)

Chapter 5: Discussion

The research question this study sought to answer was: How do students enrolled in a U.S. university ESL program experience the transition to English-only? English-only is an
approach to English language teaching commonly adopted by university English language programs in the U.S. that contrasts with approaches used widely in countries where English is taught as a foreign language, in which both languages are used in the teaching and learning environment. Underlying this study is an assumption that a shift from such a bilingual approach to an English-only approach requires some adaptation on the part of students. The researcher sought to understand whether, to what extent, and in what ways students adapt to English-only.

Several common thematic categories emerged from the participants’ accounts: their story of the encounter with English-only, their struggle with English-only; their attitude toward English-only; their experience of the English-only classroom in the Intensive English Program; and their response to the opportunities for learning that it affords. Within these broad thematic areas, the findings reveal unique experiences: English-only, established as classroom policy in the Intensive English Program, is experienced by the participants in a variety of ways.

The chapter is organized in the following way. A general summary of the findings is given, highlighting important themes that emerged from the research. Following this, the findings are reviewed first in light of prior research, showing in particular how the ESL setting yields findings that contrast in various ways with research conducted in foreign language contexts. Next, the relevance of bilingual process theory and bilingual product theory are examined in relation to the findings of this study. Implications for practice are offered, followed by suggestions for future research, and concluding comments.

**Summary of the Findings**

Major themes emerging from the participants’ accounts can be characterized as follows:
• Unique paths to English-only: learners may encounter English-only in various ways, or not at all, before coming to an ESL program in the U.S., and this impacts their perception of and experience with English-only in the U.S. program.

• Struggle: learners experience struggles of various types when transitioning to English-only, in particular with communication and comprehension difficulties, and with a negative affective response to the English-only classroom.

• English-only as subjectively determined: while the classroom may have the outward appearance of being English-only, learners differ in the extent to which they experience it as English-only.

• Willingness (or lack of willingness) to exploit learning opportunities: learners vary in their willingness to take advantage of the affordances for learning (van Lier, 2004) that the English-only classroom offers.

• Thinking in the L1 and L2: while some learners state that they think in English, for others using English involves mentally switching between English and their first language.

These findings, and their implications, are described below.

**Unique paths to English-only.** It became clear even during the recruitment of the participants that the transition to English-only is not a clear-cut process that occurs when an individual arrives in the U.S. or another English-speaking country for the purpose of studying English. Several of the participants had encountered an English-only teaching approach prior to their arrival at the Intensive English Program: some participants, for example, had previously learned in another English language program in the U.S. while others had enrolled in English-only programs in their country. Thus, what emerged from the research was less about students’ adaptation to English-only in the Intensive English Program in particular, and more about an
extended journey of encounter with English-only, one that reflects the reality of students’ diverse experiences with English learning before they arrive at a university English language program in the U.S. This is itself a useful finding: the individuals in university ESL classrooms may be more or less experienced with the practices of the English-only classroom, and may require differing degrees of explicit instruction in how to make the best use of this learning environment, such as the importance of interacting with the other students in the room.

**Struggle.** All the participants reported a struggle of some kind with English-only, but the struggles varied in type and intensity. Additionally, for some participants the struggle is mostly over, while for others it continues. The struggle may be to comprehend all the language spoken in the classroom. While the failure to understand may cause discomfort such as stress or alienation, learners may not make these feelings known, or they may pretend they understand. There may be a struggle to speak in class, and this can be caused by internal factors such as an inability to detach oneself from grammar rules, or by the external, social and interactional features of the classroom, such as a reluctance to engage younger classmates in an exchange of opinions. The initial encounter with English-only may be accompanied by feelings of being overwhelmed, which may lead to resistance or feelings of desperation and isolation. Learners may also struggle with feelings of inferiority about their English, believing that others are better speakers. Or, they may feel that their American teachers, who are unfamiliar with their language and culture, cannot address their specific needs, and hence those needs remain unmet.

**English-only as a subjectively determined.** Another significant finding is that while English-only is established as a policy for teaching and student interaction in many ESL programs (see the excerpts from student handbooks in Chapter 1), in practice this may not result in an English-only learning environment for individual students, some of whom say that they
confer with others in their first language in class, use first language resources to aid comprehension, and think in their first language. Learners, in other words, retain control of the language environment to some extent.

Levine (2011), drawing on the work of Wenger, argues that a language classroom is a community of practice, a social institution that provides means to get things done, to share information or knowledge, and to learn. Such a community “cannot be legislated into existence or defined by decree” (Wenger, as cited in Levine, 2011). Consequently, learning in a language classroom is not determined by any design features imposed on it (such as an English-only policy), but takes place as a response to the conditions created. Participants in the study responded to these conditions in various ways: some managed their learning (or attempted to) by means of English exclusively; others relied on their first languages, not only in the sense that they had no other choice (they could not help thinking in their first language, they said), but also because using the first language, for example to check meaning, was a part of their own learning strategy. Hence G. Cook’s (2010) assertion that even in monolingual classrooms students will use their own language may need to be modified to take account of learners who make a conscious effort to work and think only in English: it may be more accurate to say that even in monolingual classrooms, students will decide for themselves how to manage their learning, and this may or may not include use of the first language as a resource. English-only is not simply created by policy or rules; it is also brought into being – or it is not – by learners in the classroom.

Willingness (or lack of willingness) to exploit learning opportunities. A further finding is that some students find it difficult, or are unwilling, to take advantage of the social and interactional features of the English-only classroom as a resource for learning. Much of the
success of an English-only classroom in a U.S. ESL program is based on the communicative style of teaching (V. Cook, 2008; J. C. Richards & Rodgers, 2001), which itself relies on the presence of a group of learners with different first languages placed into situations (tasks, discussions, or activities) in which they are required to communicate with each other in English. For this type of interaction to take place, students should feel comfortable speaking in class and interacting with each other. While some participants were able to participate in this way, others had more difficulty, in particular some of the participants who were older or had more life experience. Such individuals may be reluctant to share sophisticated opinions with classmates who, they assume, will not understand these opinions or hold only poorly supported opinions themselves. In this way, the opportunity to practice speaking skills may be restricted. Learners may feel little connection to their classmates, seeing them simply as other people in the room learning English rather than as a potential resource for learning. Additionally, some learners may be reluctant to speak up in class in what they consider to be incorrect English, and consequently remain silent. For such students, the potential of the English-only classroom may not be realized.

The concept of investment (Norton & McKinney, 2011) may be helpful in understanding the decision to remain silent and refusal to participate among some learners. The notion of investment suggests that learners will make an effort to learn – invest in their learning – if they believe they will gain more resources and therefore a good return on the investment. Norton and McKinney (2011) cite a research study by Duff, in which a teacher attempted to foster respect for cultural diversity, but in which the learners remained silent for fear of being criticized or laughed at for their poor English. Although the learners’ silence was interpreted by the native English speakers in the class as a lack of motivation or initiative, Norton and McKinney (2011) argue that, “they were not invested in the language practices of their classroom” (p. 75), because
of a perceived imbalance of power between the native speakers and non-native speakers in the class.

A similar lack of investment may arise from a sense that one’s classmates are not worth interacting with because of the perception that it is not possible to learn from individuals from other countries who have a similar level of English. The notion of investment may, conversely, help explain why some learners perceive themselves to be in an environment rich in English learning potential, in which it is worthwhile to create opportunities to learn English in interaction with classmates. Students who are willing to make a greater investment in the practices of the English-only classroom may be more likely than others to exploit its potential for learning. This again points to the conclusion that English-only may be a useful approach for many students, but not for all.

**Thinking in the L1 and L2.** A final way in which the participants vary in their response to English-only is in their ability to think in English as opposed thinking in the first language. Although it is not possible to ‘get inside the head’ of the participants to understand precisely what they experience, what they are referring to may be what in sociocultural theory is known as ‘inner speech’ or ‘private speech,’ (Lantolf, 2011; Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2011) mental talk that is theorized to mediate or serve as a tool for learning. Among the participants in the study, some are more experienced at learning in an English-only environment, demonstrate a greater commitment to speaking English outside the classroom, and are much more fluent English speakers than others. In fact, among all the participants, fluency – the rapidity with which a speaker turns thoughts into speech – appears to be related in some way to the extent to which they claim to think in English or their first language. What is not clear is whether this difference is accounted for by individual inherent personal differences among the participants, or
if the ability to ‘think in English’ comes with increasing proficiency in the language. The latter position would be consistent with Kroll and Stewart’s Revised Hierarchical model of bilingual language production (Kroll & Stewart, as cited in Myers-Scotton, 2006), which posits that second language words are initially connected to concepts indirectly via the first language, but that as bilinguals develop their proficiency in the second language, direct connections develop between the second language words and their concepts.

The notion of ‘thinking in English’ may also be related to automaticity or automatization (Mitchell & Myles, 2004) in the information-processing theory of second language acquisition. In this theory, second language learning is seen as a skill, like driving or playing tennis. The brain is capable of only a limited amount of conscious attention, and at an early stage of learning when the skill is less familiar, it requires much conscious attention. With greater practice and familiarity, performing the skill at a certain level becomes automatic, freeing up conscious attention for further learning. When some of the participants state that they do not need to think in their first language, they may be describing a state in which much of the processing of English internally has become automatic, hence they no longer need to mediate their English learning through the use of their first language. More complex language may still require controlled processing (Mitchell & Myles, 2004), which is mediated internally by means of the first language.

Although the above is somewhat speculative, the participants’ accounts do appear to align with the notions of mediation from sociocultural theory (Lantolf, 2011; Swain et al., 2011) and automatization in information processing theory (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). What is most significant, however, is the very different experiences learners have as they participate in the English-only classroom. While the observable or public language of the classroom is English, the
internal language of learners may be English, or it may include a large amount of the learner’s own language. Although English-only is a policy that is applied equally to all students, it is experienced and made use of in different ways and to varying extents by them.

**The Findings in Light of the Research Literature**

The majority of research into first and second language use in language teaching and learning has been carried out in English as a foreign language classrooms in non-English speaking countries, and in foreign language classrooms in English-speaking countries. Much of the research has attempted to shed light on code-switching in those classrooms, since in most cases the students’ first and second languages were used by both teachers and students (Crawford, 2004; de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Edstrom, 2006; Inbar-Lourie, 2010; van der Meij & Zhao, 2010). In most of the studies, code-switching was considered to be beneficial: teachers switched to the first language to explain vocabulary or grammar, to manage the classroom, and to establish rapport or solidarity with the students. Students drew on their first language as a resource for comprehension and to manage tasks, and for off-task talk. In contrast to these contexts, in the Intensive English Program students do not tend to have the option to code-switch as an aid to learning, because in most classrooms they have relatively little contact with speakers of their language. However, given the apparent usefulness of teacher and learner code-switching for learning, evidenced in the majority of the findings, one should expect to see negative effects of not having this opportunity in an English-only classroom. Indeed, negative effects are evident in the findings of the present study. Two participants reported that they understood only 80% of the teacher’s talk, and others reported being unable to speak at times in their classes. In sociocultural terms, they are unable to draw on the possibility of code-switching as a tool to mediate second language speech which might lead to further learning. On the other
hand, of all the participants in the study, only one, Sabina, appears to desire this possibility, and this opens up an intriguing question about the circumstances under which code-switching may or may not be regarded as valuable.

The majority of previous research into first and second language use in language classrooms has been carried out in state elementary and secondary schools and in the foreign language departments of universities. In the case of elementary and secondary education, learners are not there by choice, and hence not learning English (or foreign language in an English-speaking country) voluntarily: they are required to be there. Additionally, many universities have foreign language requirements, meaning that even in these contexts, students may be participating in classes on a mandatory basis. One might speculate, then, that code-switching is advocated, permitted, and appreciated in those situations because it makes language learning more accessible, perhaps even more palatable, to learners who are required to be in class, and whose motivation may depend on an ongoing sense of achievement. The fact that teachers code-switch in order to establish rapport with students and explain language such as grammar or new vocabulary is consistent with the idea that they are using the first language to support student learning in a situation that the students find themselves in involuntarily.

Two studies from the literature review in particular present a striking contrast with the present study with regard to learners’ attitudes to English-only and native English-speaking teachers. Rao’s study conducted in mainland China (Rao, 2010) and Ma’s study conducted in Hong Kong (Ma, 2012) both brought to light some dissatisfaction among students with their native English-speaking teachers. While some of the students were satisfied by learning in classes with native English-speaking teachers, others were dissatisfied with the native English speakers’ insensitivity to their students’ linguistic problems because of a lack of knowledge of
their language, and found their explanations confusing. Conversely, many of the students were appreciative of their Chinese teachers’ ability to help them understand English, facilitate communication, and be sympathetic to their problems with English. In contrast to the students in Rao’s (2010) and Ma’s (2009) studies, most of the students in the present study did not express negative thoughts about their teachers’ inability to help them using their first language. This raises the question of why there should be such a difference.

A possible reason for the difference is that what makes programs such as the Intensive English Program special is their voluntary nature: students have chosen to be there. Moreover, they have made a considerable investment in being there, leaving their families and friends in their country, and investing large amounts of time and money in their learning. Hence, even though some learners understand only 80% of what their teachers say, and even though there may be frustration in comprehending or in the inability to express themselves freely, they persist with English-only and do not report that they would prefer an approach that incorporates their first language. The single exception is Sabina, who needed to improve her English for her work, and unexpectedly won a scholarship to improve her English in the U.S. She stated that she would rather have stayed in Kazakhstan to learn English, but she was required to come to the U.S. as a condition of the scholarship. Although she chose to come, she is in a sense an involuntary participant in English-only classes: this is the only approach available in a university English language program. This may be the reason why she continues to make extensive use of Russian for learning English, and why she believes staying in Kazakhstan would have been more effective for her.

Hence, while most prior research concludes that code-switching is widespread in language classrooms in the world, and that the practice is generally regarded favorably by
teachers and students, this does not necessarily make code-switching or use of the first language appropriate in a program that learners have entered voluntarily. Rather, these learners appear to favor an English-only approach; they are invested in it, and are willing to tolerate the discomforts that might otherwise be relieved by the possibility of code-switching. English-only, far from being inappropriate because it is at odds with a presumed compounding of languages in learners’ heads, as theorized in bilingual product theory (V. Cook, 1997, 2008; S. N. Sridhar, 1994; Turnbull & Dailey O’Cain, 2009b; Widdowson, 2003), is in fact congruent with learners’ aspiration to become proficient English speakers.

The Findings in Light of Bilingual Process and Bilingual Product Theory

This study drew on the work of several theorists who have argued in favor of bilingual rather than monolingual language teaching. The notions of bilingual process theory and bilingual product theory were proposed as a way of characterizing the two broad justifications for bilingual teaching. Bilingual process theorists such as Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009) and Hall and G. Cook (2012) have argued that judicious use of the first language can help with second language learning by building on learners’ existing knowledge, encouraging the flow of classroom communication and therefore of second language speech, and as an aid to comprehension. Bilingual product theorists such as V. Cook (1997, 2008) and Widdowson (2003) have taken a stronger position, proposing that the purpose of second language learning is bilingualism, and arguing that second language teaching should reflect this goal. A classroom in which bilingual product theory holds sway would encourage the bringing together of languages in the mind in a process of compound bilingualization, would include code-switching as an unmarked practice, and might encourage learners to think of themselves as becoming bilingual rather than simply learners of an additional language (Levine, 2009).
Based on the findings of this study, bilingual product theory appears to be problematic as a basis for organizing the teaching and learning of second languages. Bilingual product theory assumes that if the product is to be bilingualism, then the process should also be bilingual. Widdowson (2003) argues, “It would appear…that we have a disparity here between teaching procedures, which are directed at keeping the languages coordinately separate by seeking to suppress L1, and learning that can only proceed by compounding them” (p. 150-151). Yet this goes against the evidence of those learners who have made a conscious effort to keep their languages separate in their learning, and who report that they are now able to use English without resorting to use of their first language for much or all of the time. Even among the participants that make greater use of their first language to support their learning of English, it is not clear that learning must proceed by compounding languages. While it is true that some learners state that they think in their first language while using the second, the experience of others who claim to think in English suggests that this will not necessarily continue to be the case if they continue studying English. Indeed, one participant in this study reported that she has started to compose her writing in English, suggesting that for her English is breaking away from its connection with the first language and is becoming an independent language system in her mind.

Some participants in the study show evidence of coordinate bilingualism, in that they switch between languages depending on their interlocutor or on which domain of their life they are speaking about. For example, they may speak their first language with other speakers of that language, and reserve English for communications with speakers of other languages. One participant in this study described the effort to speak about one culture in the language of another. She describes a separation of English and Arabic to think and talk about the different
aspects of her life in two different cultures, and says she is not able to speak about one in the language of the other. This seems to be evidence for coordinate, not compound bilingualism.

The idea that learners are developing a single system comprising two or more languages is represented in multicompetence theory (V. Cook, 1999, 2008), and the notion of composite language competence (Kachru, 1994), or multiple languages in one conceptual system (Kecskes, 2009). These ideas in turn underlie bilingual product theory that advocates the alignment of teaching with compound bilingualism (Widdowson, 2003). This approach is not supported by the participants’ accounts in this study, which appear to reveal a separating out of the first and second languages with increased progress in the second language.

On the other hand, bilingual process theory, which supports judicious use of the first language to support second language learning, is of relevance to students in a U.S. university English program. This may be true even if bilingual process theory cannot be enacted in the teaching in a classroom with students from multiple language backgrounds and a teacher who does not know the students’ first languages. For several of the participants in the study, their learning of English in the Intensive English Program is supported by reference to bilingual dictionaries and other first language materials, thinking in the first language, and even illicit whispers to each other in the first language behind the teacher’s back. Recall that one participant researches and records new vocabulary in Chinese as well as English: “sometimes the explanations, it has many difficult words, so I need Chinese meaning” (Fengqi, p. 23). This suggests not only that some learners feel the need to make use of first language resources, but also that doing so is not necessarily in conflict with a policy that proscribes the speaking of other languages in the classroom. The question is, can some aspects of a bilingual learning approach coexist successfully with a monolingual teaching approach?
Implications for Practice

Based on the present study, English-only policies and practices appear to be justifiable in university English language programs in which students are participating voluntarily. They appear to be less of a good fit for students who may not have chosen freely to be in them. It is possible that the number of ‘involuntary participants’ in university English language programs is small. On the other hand, there is reason to believe that their numbers may be significant and growing. Scholarship programs such as Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah Scholarships Program (“King Abdullah Scholarships Program,” 2013) are making it possible for thousands of individuals to pursue higher education in the U.S., most of whom need to improve their English for a year or more before matriculating into an undergraduate or graduate program (Lindsey, 2011). Similarly, large numbers of Chinese students are seeking degrees from U.S. universities: there are over 150,000 Chinese students in the U.S. (Fischer, 2011b). The Saudi students attend U.S. university ESL programs because their scholarship will cover the cost (“King Abdullah Scholarships Program,” 2013), and many Chinese students attend ESL programs as part of universities’ conditional offer or ‘pathway’ programs (Fischer, 2008). These two nationalities accounted for much of the 14% growth in U.S. English language program enrollments in 2010, and what they have in common is that English language learning is not the end, but only a means to their ultimate goal, a U.S. university degree.

It cannot be assumed, therefore, that these students ‘buy into’ English-only and will embrace it during their English language studies. While many students may embrace the English-only approach as presenting an opportunity to learn English, for others, this approach may not be one that they are inclined toward. Such students may be more likely to maintain their attachment to their own culture and language, by living and socializing with others from their culture, and
failing to take advantage of the affordances for learning offered by an English-only program in an English-speaking country.

For this reason, programs might take some measures to ensure that prospective students are aware that the approach taken to English teaching is English-only, and what they will need to do to take advantage of the learning opportunities this particular environment affords. The information might cover such topics as anticipating the stress that an English-only classroom can cause; the expectation that students will try their best to carry on their communications only in English in the classroom; and advice on creating contacts with students from other nationalities or with individuals in the university or wider community in order to support English learning. Placing such information in publicity materials could have the effect of discouraging some individuals from choosing this kind of environment for study. For those planning on entering the program, it might serve as preparation to take advantage of the learning opportunities offered by the monolingual approach.

The findings of this study also suggest that some students might benefit from an initial orientation in the policies and practices of the English-only classroom. Such an orientation might go beyond merely communicating the English-only policy, beyond even advising students on how to take advantage of English-only teaching for themselves. Informed by this study, with its unique, personal accounts from a variety of students transitioning to English only – of the struggle to speak; of the need for relief from English and to use the first language; of the attachment to one’s own country and language, and the need to use the first language in learning English; of limited opportunities to communicate in English outside the classroom; and the stories of embrace of English-only, and success with the approach – these accounts may provide teachers with a deeper understanding of the inner worlds and thoughts that students bring with
them to the classroom, and help to make English-only not simply a policy to be imposed, but an approach to be adopted with empathy and sensitivity.

This brings us back to the question of whether an English-only teaching policy can coexist with individual students’ need for their first language as a resource for learning. English-only policies that, like those cited in the introduction, are limited to the teachers’ and students’ talk in the classroom, can still leave room for students to mediate their own learning using their first language if required. English-only policies do not need to restrict students from using bilingual dictionaries, from engaging in self-talk in the first language, or even discreetly consulting with a classmate in the first language if it helps. Implementing English-only with empathy implies an understanding that each student, even placed into the same level of English class, is in a unique place with regard to the need to continue using the first language for support, or, on the other hand, becoming independent of it. If teachers and administrators who advocate and implement English-only policies in U.S. university English language programs were to take these insights on board, students would surely benefit by finding and choosing their own way to navigate between their own language and English.

**Future Research**

This study sought to understand the experiences of English language learners transitioning to the English-only approach of a university English program. One of my motivations for carrying out this research was to inform discussion about monolingual versus bilingual approaches in the language classroom by means of empirical data. Using a phenomenological approach that investigated each individual’s experience and the commonalities and divergences among them, the study revealed several insights that might inform the discussion. It found that students may enter a university English program with
various experiences of English-only teaching, and varying propensities to take advantage of this approach to teaching. It revealed that although an English-only policy may be in place for teaching and classroom language, students differed in the degree to which they experienced the environment as an English-language environment, some perceiving it as an environment rich in English, and others experiencing it as a location where their first language was engaged in constant interplay with English, whether in inner or private speech, as a means for learning, or in communication with other speakers of the same first language. It also found variance in students’ inclination to enter into English language interaction with speakers of other first languages, with some students engaging in such interactions and others – particularly older students – experiencing a lack of connection with their classmates that limited such interactions. It revealed a lack of investment in English-only teaching and learning practices on the part of some students, and on the other hand an embrace of these practices by others. The deeper understanding of how students transition to and encounter English-only that this study provides suggests that English language programs might communicate this approach to prospective and new students in new ways, and provides a basis for a more empathetic implementation of the policy.

Future research might extend the findings of this study by exploring the experiences of learners from different countries and parts of the world, or it might focus on specific demographics, such as students from a particular country or students with particular reasons for learning English. Research into teachers’ understandings of English-only – how they rationalize it, for example, or how they implement it in their own classrooms – would give greater insight into this widely taken-for-granted set of practices. Alternative qualitative approaches, such as whole-class or individual case studies, might yield more comprehensive or more in-depth data for analysis. Finally, English-only classrooms might be a useful location for research into how
the interplay of mediation using the first language and the process of automatization results in
greater or less success in English learning, a blending of cognitive and socially oriented second
language acquisition research traditions that some regard as necessary for the further
understanding of second language acquisition (Block, 2003).

Conclusion

In university ESL programs in the U.S, an unquestioned embrace of English-only
teaching is widespread. Student handbooks tell students to use only English in the classroom and
in some cases everywhere on the program premises. Programs may claim that this approach is
characteristic of a ‘serious’ English language program, or that students should speak only
English for their own benefit. Students may be told that using their first language is not helpful
for learning English. They may also be told that using their own language may be considered
impolite or insulting to others, and that using only English will help them to make friends.

On the other hand, a review of the research literature reveals that the first language is
alive and well in many English as a foreign language classrooms throughout the world, and that
although some teachers express reservations about its use (Carless, 2008; Copland & Neokleous,
2011; Ma, 2009), many teachers and students are in favor. The first language is used in language
classrooms for task management, comprehension, grammar and vocabulary learning, rapport
building, and other purposes. This suggests that theorists who argue in favor of first language use
(Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Butzkamm, 2003; V. Cook, 1997; Cummins, 2007, 2009; Hall &
Cook, 2012; S. N. Sridhar, 1994; Turnbull & Dailey O’Cain, 2009a; Widdowson, 2003), may be
overstating their case: there is little need to argue for the use of the first language in foreign
language learning if the first language is being used widely. Where their arguments might be
relevant is in English language programs in English-speaking countries, where the merits of
English-only are simply assumed. Yet there is virtually no published research that addresses English-only teaching in ESL programs in English-speaking countries. And the voices of students in these programs – those who are most affected by English-only methodology, theory, learning materials, and program policies – are nowhere to be heard.

The present research study has attempted to correct this by asking how students experience the transition to English-only. What it reveals is that simply imposing an English-only rule, or arguing either in favor or against English-only in theory overlooks the complex reality that students accept, experience, and exploit English-only to differing extents. This suggests that English language educators should reconsider the taken-for-granted assumption that English-only is the best or only way to teach, and evaluate English-only in light of the success or otherwise that individual learners have with it.
References


Dailey O’Cain (Eds.), *First language use in second and foreign language learning* (pp. 131–144). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.


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doi:10.1177/1362168810375362


Turnbull, M. (2001). There is a role for the L1 in second and foreign language teaching, but...


Appendix A: Draft Recruitment Flyer

Invitation to Participate in Research

How do you use your first language when you learn English? Have you started to ‘think in English?’ Do you enjoy using ‘English-only’ at this English language program?

Alan Broomhead, a staff member at this program, is conducting research into students’ use of their first language for studying English. This research is part of a Doctor of Education degree that he is working on.

Can you help?

If…

- You haven’t studied in an English-speaking country before
- Your level is High C or Low D
- You have a little time to participate in two interviews

…then you may be able to help with this research.

You do not need to speak ‘perfect’ English to participate.

Please fill out the attached form and drop it in the mailbox of Office 222 if you are interested in being a part of this research.

Thank you.

Alan Broomhead
Appendix B: Interview Schedules

First Interview

1. Can you tell me about how you learned English before you came to this program?

   Prompts: Describe your schools, your teachers, your textbooks.

2. Did your teachers speak your first language and English in the classroom? Can you describe how?

   Prompts: Use of language for giving instructions, for organizing the class, for explaining meaning, for teaching grammar or vocabulary, for translation.

3. Try to recall your own use of your first language and English in those situations. Can you describe how you used both languages?

   Prompts: Use of language for interacting with peers, for completing classroom tasks, for understanding English, for learning grammar or vocabulary.

4. Can you tell me about how effective you think your English learning was before you came to this program?

   Prompts: What techniques were useful? If you used your first language, how did it help or hinder your learning of English?

5. Please tell me about your decision to study in an ESL program in the United States.

   Prompts: How did you expect it to be different, if at all? Did you expect the teaching to be all in English, and if so, what did you think about that?
6. Can you describe your classes in this program?

Prompts: How are they different from or similar to your previous English learning experiences? What aspects of your classes do you find interesting or unusual?

7. What is your teacher’s approach to your first language in the classroom?

Prompts: Are you permitted to use your first language? Are you encouraged to use your first language? Has your teacher established any rules about using your first language?

8. What do you think about this approach to your first language?

Prompts: Are you in favor of it? Are you comfortable in the classroom with this approach? Can you understand everything? Do you generally find it easy or difficult?

9. What happens to your first language in the classroom?

Prompts: Are you able to think and carry out all your tasks in English? Do you translate things for yourself? Do you take notes in your first language? Do you use a bilingual dictionary? Do you speak your first language with people from your country or who speak the same language?

10. How effective do you think it is to have classes in English only?

Prompts: Are you learning English faster than before? Have you been able to develop new abilities in English? Are you making good progress? Does anything hinder your progress?
Further prompts: What do you mean by…? Can you tell me more about…? Can you give me an example of…?

**Second Interview**

1. Have you had any new thoughts about how you learned English in your country, especially about the use of your first language?

2. Have you thought any more about the effectiveness of your learning of English during those years?

3. Do you have any new thoughts about your classes in this program, especially about your teacher’s use of English only?

4. Have you had any new feelings or thoughts about using English only or your first language in this program?

5. Have you noticed anything new about what happens to your first language in your classes?

6. How effective do you now think it is to have classes in English only?

Prompts: What do you mean by…? Can you tell me more about…? Can you give me an example of…?