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ABSTRACT

The English language skills needed by bilingual high school students, particularly Spanish speaking students with limited English ability, are considered. Secondary level bilingual students' needs differ from those of elementary school bilingual students because of the diversity of student backgrounds, variety of curricular demands, and diversity of future language skill needs among secondary students. Two studies of the language skills of Spanish speaking high school students are summarized. These studies show that linguistic competence can be differentiated from communicative competence, both theoretically and in terms of other criterion variables describing actual language use and school achievement. The findings suggest a need for further research into the nature of skills transfer across languages, effective teaching strategies, and relationships between language skills and achievement. (Author/RW)

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BILINGUAL EDUCATION AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL: WHAT WE KNOW AND WHAT WE DON'T

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This paper presents issues, summarizes some recent research, and raises questions about the language skills needed by bilingual students in high school. The focus is on students who are still in the process of learning English as a second language rather than on those who are already fluent bilinguals or English dominant. The main issues noted are the great diversity of student background, the variety of curricular demands, and the diversity of students' future needs for language skills; all these are areas in which secondary level students differ from those in elementary bilingual programs. Two recent research studies dealing specifically with the language skills of Spanish-speaking high school students are summarized. These studies show that linguistic competence, or control of grammar, can be differentiated from communicative competence, or ability to convey information, both theoretically and in terms of other criterion variables describing actual language use and school achievement. Questions regarding the nature of skills transfer across languages, effective teaching strategies, and relationships between language skills and achievement are then posed as topics requiring careful analysis and further research.

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This paper provides information and raises some questions about bilingual education at the secondary level. Because most federal bilingual education programs have focused on the elementary level, the needs of older students have generally not been emphasized as part of the national research agenda for bilingual education. In fact, bilingual students at the high school level have been called "Los Olvidados" (the forgotten ones) because of the few programs designed for them (Gradisnik, 1975). There are few federal programs to describe their particular academic skills and needs. In this presentation I will offer some general comments regarding the educational situation of these older second-language learners, summarize some of the recent research dealing with their linguistic needs, and then consider a few of the many important areas we still do not know very much about.

First, I would like to define the scope of the presentation. Generally I will be concerned with Spanish-speaking students at the secondary level, for two reasons: they are by far the largest and fastest growing group of non-English speaking students, both nationwide and here in California (National Advisory Council in Bilingual Education, 1980-81: 28). Second, they are the students who participated in most of the research I will describe. I will not deal here with the needs of ethnic minority students who are already English dominant, but only with those of students still in the process of learning English as a second language.

Let us begin with some very general observations. The first is the great diversity shown by students in bilingual education programs. We know that Spanish-speaking high school students have extremely varied backgrounds in terms of the type of education received before coming to the United States, the circumstances of their coming to the United States -- whether immigrant or refugee; the number of family members here with them; and the educational backgrounds and aspirations of their families. All of these external circumstances can affect student progress in school.

We also know that these students vary in their mastery of Spanish literacy skills. This variety of literacy skills in Spanish affects their ability to take advantage of instruction in Spanish and English and make use of curriculum materials.

We know that their oral proficiency in English and their English literacy skills are also extremely varied. There is thus great diversity of student background.

We know that the demands of a high school curriculum are more varied than those made by the elementary school. In high school a student takes a variety of subjects from several different teachers, each of whom is a specialist. Each class in a high school curriculum makes different types of linguistic demands on the learner. Language is important in all classes, of course, but the relative importance of one aspect of language --

listening, reading, or oral expression -- may be different in different subject areas. The curricular variety students experience in high school means that one approach to instruction -- one method of bilingual teaching or of ESL instruction -- will not fit every subject area. Just as the subjects vary, first and second language instruction will have to vary too.

Finally, we know that bilingual students at the high school level have different plans for their futures. These plans and goals obviously affect their general attitude toward education and their perception of the importance of language skills. This presents a dual challenge to their teachers. Teachers must help students develop the language skills needed for progress in high school, and they must help students attain the skills needed to cope with the variety of linguistic demands including needs for reading and writing skills to be made in future settings. Although the bilingual students in high school (like many other high school students) are not often certain about their future plans, we must take the diversity of future activities seriously. This means we must find ways to assist students in developing their language skills once they have left high school classrooms and gone on to other positions; hence we need to give some thought to enabling students to develop and meet their own goals for English language skills once they have left the high school ESL classroom.

We know, in sum, that variety of student background, of curricular demands, and of future goals affect the development of English skills in high school.

I would now like to turn to some research which deals with related issues, looking at some of the cognitive and social facts about adolescent language use, and considering the question of attitudes and motivation, and examining some of the research on language skills and school progress.

First, let us survey some of the research on the cognitive skills which develop during this time. High school-age learners are adolescents, and this in itself has important cognitive and social consequences for language acquisition. We know that adolescents are cognitively more advanced than younger children. This cognitive advantage is demonstrated in language by increasing ability to use a variety of speech acts in communication (Fogel, 1976) and by increasing ability to take the listener's needs into account (Flavell, et al., 1968). This increased cognitive capacity also gives adolescents an advantage over children in the rate of mastering the grammar and syntax of a second language (Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978).

Adolescents also assume social roles different from younger children, and this too affects language use and second language learning. This is an area where we have little evidence to date. Sociolinguists have often studied the language of specialized adolescent groups like street gangs in order to demonstrate its rule-governed behavior (Labov, 1972). The effect of

other kinds of group membership and changing social roles on adolescent language behavior has gone largely unstudied. Sociologist Allan Grimshaw notes that "the focus on the extremely compacted processes of language acquisition and socialization and of the learning of interpersonal skills in the early years has led to the relative neglect of the continuing acquisition and refinement of linguistic and social skills" (1981 [1976]: 105). He also remarks that cognitive skills continue to develop: there is evidence supporting the "elaboration and extension of grammatical rules learned in childhood" (105) and the "expansion of the lexicon throughout the individual's life" (109). Other sociologists have noted that "behavioral patterns change in response to membership in different peer and reference groups" (105) as Grimshaw notes. Where adolescence "is characterized as a time of trying on new identities" (115), as it is in our culture, new ways of speaking may arise in response to the move into new social spheres such as bureaucratic settings or dating relationships (1981: 115). Such new ways of speaking will thus be important for second language learners as well as native speakers.

The students who participated in my research believed that new social roles affect motivation to learn; they see English as important in terms not only of interpersonal communication but also in items of future employment. Let us take a look at what they say. (The students here are all in the tenth or eleventh grade and have been in the United States an average of two and a half years.)

Sample A

Tomás: Why do we have bilingual education in the school?

Luis: Cause it's important. We can have a better jobs, you can get more -- como? -- we can get more -- contact with other people.

Tomás: Yeah. Is there a problem because we contact too many things? (Play on words.)

Luis: Yeah, man.

Arturo: Hey, that's in English. (teasing)

.....

Arturo: It's important to us, you know, so we could learn -- that way we could learn more English and then get a better -- get a job.

Tomás: What about if you are an American and you don't speak Spanish and you're learning Spanish?

Luis: It's important.

Arturo: It's important too cause if I wanted to learn another language, you know --

Luis: This you can talk to another man, they don't speak.

Arturo: I can translate it to another man, that he can't speak English or Spanish.

From the discussion, we know that these students want to learn English not only to survive in school but also to get along outside of school. Later I will describe the analysis used to relate these speech samples to the language tests given in more detail. For the moment, the content of their discussion provides a convenient point of departure for exploring some of what we know about the language attitudes and skills of secondary level bilingual students.

We know that these students want to learn English. They see it as important for communicating with people and for getting jobs in the future. (While it is dangerous to put too much weight on opinions expressed in such a discussion, which was set up solely for the purpose of the research, the statements made here reflect similar comments which occurred in the classrooms I observed; hence they can be taken as representative opinions for some of the students with whom we are concerned.)

The question of attitude toward English is an important one. We know that student attitudes toward English and toward education vary greatly at the high school level, partially in response to those held by their parents and by their peers. Earlier research suggesting that many Spanish-speaking students were not interested in educational progress (e.g., Madsen, 1964) has been challenged by more recent investigations of educational attitudes. This later research (Fernández, Espinosa, and Dornbusch, 1975) indicates that Spanish-speakers, like other high school students, are influenced by the opinions of people close to them, namely their parents and friends. In that study, Spanish-speakers perceived their parents as being quite interested in their learning of math and English while their friends were less so; in both respects, the Spanish-speakers were similar to the Asian-Americans, Blacks, and other whites surveyed. Thus we know that parental attitudes towards the learning of English are perceived as quite favorable by Spanish-speaking high school students. Peer attitudes towards the importance of English were less favorable than those of parents in this study. The proportion of friends who valued the learning of English was about half that of parents.

We know that the opinions of the peer group play an important role during the high school years. It is plausible that peer pressure might shape actual language use as well as the perception of the importance of learning English. Indeed, Ramírez has noted that "Language-related matters may be very important to bilingual adolescents -- an awareness of the . . . distribution of the two

languages in their home, community, region and nation, may affect their attitudes toward their language dominance pattern" (1979: 165). The psychologist R. C. Gardner offers some additional evidence on the importance of peer group opinion specifically related to the learning of English. While his results are based on the opinions of educators working with native American students all over the United States, they furnish a dramatic example of the power of peers in adolescence. In Gardner's survey, the educators reported that the amount of peer pressure to avoid using English rose steadily from the first grade to the seventh, where it reached a peak and then declined only slightly (Gardner 1979: 324-325). This suggests that student attitudes towards the use of English are different at different grade levels and that adolescents may experience more pressure to avoid the use of English than do younger children.

We also know that motivation to learn and use English and to strive for success in school may vary according to the students' previous background in Spanish-speaking countries versus in the United States do not always agree. In one study of seventh and eighth graders in a small city on the United States-Mexican border, Baral found that students educated for two to four years in Mexico scored significantly lower on various achievement measures (grade point average, academic grade point average, SAT reading comprehension) than a comparable group of native-born Mexican-Americans (Bara, 1979: 5-7). In contrast, a study conducted in the Ventura County area by Ferris and Politzer found that Mexican-born junior high school students surpassed a similar group of native-born students on various measures of academic success and adjustment such as trying harder in classes and discussing classwork with teachers. The English composition skills of the two groups were approximately equal. Thus while the written English skills of the two groups were approximately equivalent, the students born in Mexico who had achieved literacy in Spanish before arrival in the United States showed "more positive attitudes towards school achievement and seemed more highly motivated" (Ferris and Politzer, 1981: 272). Here, researchers noted that initial instruction in the home language was associated with "motivational rather than purely linguistic considerations" and caution that "initial instruction in the primary language in the country of the primary language and initial instruction in the second language in the country of the second language are differentiated by many cultural and environmental factors" (ibid., 273) which affect educational outcomes in different ways.

What do we know specifically about the language skills of Spanish-speaking students at the high school level? We know that they too are varied. These students show a range of skills in Spanish and English. To illustrate the range and the types of language skill, I would like to briefly present the results of two studies which examined the relationship between the English linguistic competence, or grammatical skill, and communicative competence, or ability to convey information, in a sample of Spanish-speaking high school students. These two studies show

how the language skills of bilingual high school students have been assessed and what questions are still unanswered.

In the first study (Politzer and Ramírez, 1981), sixty-five Spanish-speakers at one urban high school were tested as part of a larger project on the language skills of bilingual students. The students took several tests of language along with tests of cognitive style and self-concept. We will examine only the language test results here. Students were tested with two oral tests: one for linguistic competence, or ability to use grammatical structure correctly, and one for communicative competence, or ability to convey information. Both tests were given to the students in Spanish and in English. Results were illuminating.

They showed that linguistic competence in English, or grammatical correctness, was associated with English communicative competence and also with Spanish communicative competence. Oral communicative competence in Spanish, on the other hand, was not related to Spanish linguistic competence although it was related to the ability to understand directions in English. The relationship between linguistic and communicative competence in this research is interesting; generally, high linguistic competence or control of grammar, was required for higher degrees of communicative competence, but higher levels of LC did not necessarily guarantee high levels of CC in either English or Spanish.

It is important to know that these aspects of language skill are related on a theoretical level. However, we do not know what this means in terms of actual behavior in school. To find out, I carried out a separate study with thirty-five of these students (McGroarty, 1982). I found that linguistic competence could be distinguished from communicative competence not only theoretically but also in terms of relationships with other measures of behavior such as language use and achievement in school. The associations found with actual language were only moderate, although consistent: communicative competence showed a relationship with length of utterance in natural speech, and linguistic competence displayed a stronger association with measures of error rate in natural speech. Both these criterion measures were based on T-unit analysis (Larsen-Freeman and Strom, 1977; Gaies, 1980). Another part of this research dealt with the relationship between the English language test scores and achievement as measured by passage of district competency tests which were mainly cast in a multiple choice format. Passage of the competency tests was associated with overall degree of skill in English and with specifically linguistic skill, although there was extreme variation and no casual link can be drawn. Even some students who scored below the mean on the two types of oral English tests had passed most or all of the competency tests, demonstrating that their skills in oral language were not a reliable guide to performance on achievement measures.

We have now seen some research dealing with the attitudes, motivation, and second language skills of Spanish-speaking students

in secondary schools. What does it tell us? What do we know as a result of these studies?

We know that student attitude and motivation affects second language learning and mastery of academic skills. We know that the cognitive and social development of adolescents affects language use and language learning. Also, we know that proficiency in English as a second language and ability to understand and convey information in Spanish and in English seem to reflect academically important dimensions of language use. Finally, we know that tests of oral English proficiency are imperfect predictors of the English used in natural speech and of academic achievement measured in English. While English proficiency is associated with achievement in these studies as in others using larger samples (Jones et al., 1980), this does not mean that simply being proficient in oral English is enough to guarantee achievement in school.

Now, what are the things we still do not know about bilingual students at the high school level? There are many of them and I will not attempt to be exhaustive here. I would simply like to point out the many kinds of information we still need.

To do so, I will again use comments made by the three students whose discussion was described before. Towards the end of their discussion, the students were asked to suggest improvements in bilingual education. Their comments and discussion strategies suggest some of the areas we still know very little about.

Sample B

Tomás: How could bilingual education be improved? Improved.

Arturo: I don't get the word.

Luis: Como, como la esa, la educación bilingüe puede ser -- probado por ti, como.

Tomás: If you're learning.

Arturo: I learn a lot of teaching, I'm learning English -- I'm proving that I want to learn, cause I'm -- You put attention to the teacher in everything, so --

Luis: Yeah, that's true, yeah, You're improving the language.

.....

Arturo: Hey, but I said my opinion, -- how come you guys don't say your opinion?

Luis: We did what it said.

Arturo: You guys didn't say nothing.

Luis: I said the same like you. I said that if you're learning the language, you're proving the language. If you don't put some attention, you're not improving the language.

Tomás: You're right.

In discussing what we do not know about the language skills of bilingual high school students, I will concentrate on three areas: the nature of language transfer, the nature of language learning and teaching, and the connection between oral language and other school skills. All these areas are critical for those who work with older learners.

The Nature of Language Transfer

The contrastive analysis studies of the 1950's and 1960's established many possible points of 'interference' between native and second language. This interference was usually based on a comparison of sound systems and grammatical structures of the first language with those of the second, and contrastive analysis was seen as a means of possibly predicting or at least describing (James, 1980) typical error patterns, which could then be eradicated.

Contrastive analysis has had only limited influence on the recent bilingual education literature. This is, in part, because the focus of linguistics as a field has shifted to include concerns which are more developmental and sociological and take the form of psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics (Politzer, 1978). Also, many of the language learners with which bilingual education has typically been concerned are relatively young learners; even their native language patterns are still in the process of development, and often their exposure to the second language has been fairly extensive once they entered school. Thus contrastive analysis, which presupposes an established set of native language habits and somewhat circumscribed exposure to the second language, was less appropriate than developmental considerations for characterizing most language learning of these younger second language learners (Cohen, 1976), although native language influence still played a part. Furthermore, recent sociolinguistic research such as that done by Gumperz in India suggests that the very notion of interference may not be appropriate in bilingual communities, where language norms are changing because of the contact between two languages (Berk-Seligson, 1980). Still, some use of contrastive analysis techniques can be very useful for older learners whose native language is already well established. The phenomenon of language transfer is an important one for older learners;

it can provide positive support to second language learning and it can also create interference of various kinds. It is difficult to ascribe elements of correct learning in the second language to positive transfer (almost the converse of "the error in error analysis"); this is an important area for future research. Instances of interference are more easily identified.

Sample B from the discussion transcript has two interesting examples on the level of lexical transfer and one showing possible grammatical transfer.° The lexical terms show the learners using Spanish semantic information to communicate in English. The first is the misunderstanding of 'improve'; Arturo says he does not understand it and Luis, to help him out, translates 'improve' with 'probar,' a form we might have called a false cognate in contrastive analysis days. The translation, supplying 'probar' instead of the more appropriate 'mejorar,' leads both of them to employ 'prove' and 'improve' as if these two words were equivalent to the sense of English 'prove' that is now rather archaic, namely 'to experience, to learn or know by experience.' The second item transferred is that of 'putting attention,' from the idiomatic poner atención or prestar atención in Spanish. Another possible instance of language transfer, on a grammatical level, is Arturo's observation that "you guys didn't say nothing." This structure could also be due to the dialects of English used in the school, so it cannot clearly be attributed to the effect of Spanish structure which allows a double negative, although that remains a possibility.

My point in noting these particular features is not to suggest a syllabus based on contrastive analysis or even to suggest that all such errors be corrected each time they occur. I simply want to raise the possibility that information from contrastive analysis can be particularly useful in working with older learners. We need research in transfer of language skills. Most of all, we need to determine empirically whether such errors interfere with communication. The process of language transfer is still not well understood. In working with students whose first language structures and communication strategies are well established, we need to know more about the systematic effect of native language proficiency on English skills.

Even more central to the situation of high school bilingual students is the question of transfer of literacy skills. It seems intuitively correct to assume that students who are good readers and writers in their first language will have an advantage over those whose first language literacy skills are not well developed. This advantage should enhance not only their learning of English but also their learning of subject matters dependent on reading. Recent research by Goodman, Goodman, and Flores (1979) substantiates this point.

We still know very little about the transfer of reading skills across languages. It appears that much transfer takes place at a general level rather than at the level of specific decoding skills (Thonis, 1981: 153), but we do not yet know

enough about several (or specific) levels of literacy transfer. For high school students with various degrees of literacy in Spanish who face the task of becoming literate in English, the question is a vital one.

Nature of Effective Language Teaching and Learning

The second area we still know little about is the considerations of the use of language transfer, which bring us to the questions of the nature of second language teaching in a high school setting. We have seen that there is great variety in learner skills; it is a constant challenge for each teacher to provide effective instruction to each student. Also since bilingual students in high school learn language in many settings besides language arts classrooms, we need to know more about the ways students go about making sense of what they hear and see.

Let us consider first the question of language teaching in high school. Students in high school will probably receive formal language instruction in an English or ESL class and informal exposure to English in other school settings. We do not know enough about making these two sorts of input work together or encouraging students to develop oral competence in formal as well as informal varieties of English. The transcripts we have seen demonstrate that the students have mastered several aspects of peer-appropriate language -- all the "Heys" and "Yeah, man" and "You guys" -- are evidence of the sort of talk observed in many high school students, native and non-native English speakers both. How can language teachers and other teachers promote the mastery of additional varieties and encourage attention to grammatical forms so that the students' English repertoire will include a wider range of language -- that is, if they need this wider range?

We have seen that power of the peer group affects the students' attitudes toward their English classes; if an English class is viewed as a remedial class having no interesting content or engaging methods, it will be difficult for students to accept instruction as potentially useful. Here, as in other areas, the teacher is the key (Westphal, 1979). We know that unless English instruction can capture student interest, it will not be very helpful. We do not know enough about how to make this happen, either in an English or ESL class or in any other kind of class taken by bilingual high school students.

What can we do about this lack of knowledge? It is risky to go from descriptive research to instructional recommendations (Phillips, 1980), but since we are language teachers and since we know students at the high school level do need adequate opportunities to develop their language skills, we might ask how this development can be encouraged.

I have no definitive answer to this important question, but

I can advance some observations based on previous research in primary level bilingual education and on my impression from the high school classrooms where I did my research. Legarreta, who looked at Spanish-English bilingual classrooms (Legarreta, 1979) and Wong Fillmore, who looked at Chinese-English bilingual classrooms (Fillmore, 1980) both found that teachers who structured the environment by means of a set length of time devoted to each language attained better results in terms of student language learning in both English and the native language than those who allowed continuous free variation of languages. In these elementary classrooms, the structuring of time for each language was critical for student language learning. Where a certain period of time was devoted to English and another to the native language, results showed that student proficiency in English and in the native language was superior.

My own observations in high school classes suggest a similar pattern. I want to emphasize that these are simply anecdotal impressions and that I did not carry out a statistical study of classroom language use, which would be essential to determining the validity of the following assertion: in high school classrooms where the two languages are kept separate either by time allotted or by task assigned, students learn more language than they do in classrooms where two languages are used interchangeably (Swain, 1982). Some of the classrooms in which I saw very lively language-learning activities were bilingual social studies classes using English discussion as a problem solving technique and Spanish-for-native speaker classes using various types of translation and transformation tasks. Clearly, the use of such techniques requires good rapport between the teacher and the class; both of these classes had bilingual teachers who were on friendly terms with the students, so that students were willing to carry out the tasks set for them. I do not want to propose that such alternative structuring would be appropriate for all groups of classes or for all subject areas taught, but it is an element of instruction we need to examine. We do not yet know how different patterns of language use in bilingual classrooms affect either language learning or subject matter mastery. Both are critical at the high school level.

Nature of Relationship Between Oral Language and School Skills

The final question I would like to raise is in some ways the most fundamental to a consideration of the place of language teaching in the curriculum of bilingual high school students. It is this: what does oral language proficiency tell us about a student's ability to succeed in school? We assume that a student should be able to understand and read English as well as speak it in order to make progress in high school. The data cited in the first half of this presentation corroborate this to some degree.

However, when we try to assess the relative importance of strictly oral language proficiency, whether linguistic or communicative, the case becomes more complicated. It is reasonable to assume that oral language skills are important but not reasonable to assume that they are the only types of language proficiency needed for success in high school; clearly skills related to literacy also play a large part, particularly at the high school level. Nor are adequate second language skills alone enough to insure progress in school, for many other social influences and individual behavior patterns also contribute to educational progress. In looking only at oral language proficiency, my research examined only one aspect of the behavioral skills needed to succeed in school. Oral language proficiency is important but it is not the only type of skill needed.

Nor do we know just how important it is in a normative sense. It is plain that total lack of English language proficiency can prevent a student from making any progress in school, but we do not know how much oral language proficiency as measured on tests predicts either natural language performance or progress in school. In assessing the relationship between the second language tests and school achievement, we assume that there is some connection. Again, however, we do not know even if -- or precisely how -- oral language skill affects the school achievement of native speakers (Swain, 1981); in studying this connection in a sample of second language learners we make the reasonable but unvalidated assumption that various degrees of oral language skill even beyond the minimal proficiency levels may be reflected in degrees of success in school. This issue in itself needs further study.

To close this consideration on the relationship between oral language skill and achievement, I would like to turn to the work of Jim Cummins. Cummins (1979, 1980, 1981a, 1981b) has postulated two types of second language skill that affect progress in school differentially. One is basic interpersonal communication skill, or BICS, the ability to get along in face-to-face conversational interactions. This is acquired relatively quickly within two years or so, when students must deal with peers in their second language. It is clear that the students in the discussion groups we have seen are well on their way towards mastery of this dimension of language skill. More problematic is the acquisition of cognitive/academic language proficiency, or CALP (1979, 1981b). Results of a large-scale project measuring immigrant children's success in school (Cummins, 1981b) show that five to seven years may pass before children who speak English as a second language approach native English-speaking peers in academic achievement. Most of the studies on language which are cited here cannot verify any longitudinal patterns because of their cross-sectional design. They provide new and important information, though, in showing that even fairly simple achievement measures such as number of graduation competencies passed are associated with both the overall degree of second language skill the student has attained and the degree of specific

grammatical control demonstrated on a short oral test. In other words, for these students, CALP is composed, at least in part, of a general second language skill component and a unique element of structural mastery.

What does all of this mean for those who work with bilingual students at the high school level? There are no specific techniques that can be recommended on the basis of most of the research summarized here. The studies demonstrate the complexity of the influences on student progress in high school. Student background, attitude, motivation, and level of skill development in the first and in the second language all figure into the picture.

There is still a great deal we do not know about the language skills of bilingual high school students. We do not know enough about transfer of bilingual high school students. We do not know enough about transfer of skills, either oral skills or literacy skills from the first language. We do not know about the most effective methods for teaching varied student groups. We do not know enough about the relationship of language skills to school progress. Nevertheless, we do know that language skills are critical. At the high school level we must do all we can to employ first language skills and develop English skills so that students can 'prove' and 'improve' their abilities in academically relevant ways.

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