Language Learning Experience as a Contributor to ESOL Teacher Cognition

Elizabeth Margaret Ellis
University of New England
Armidale, Australia
<liz.ellis@une.edu.au>

Abstract

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in English-speaking countries are not usually required to have proficiency in another language. Teacher competency statements frequently require "an understanding of second language development," and it is assumed that a monolingual teacher can attain such understanding without having learned a second language (L2). This paper sets out to challenge such a position by establishing a theoretical framework within which to argue that teacher language learning is an important contributor to professional practice. This framework is based on research into teacher cognition, particularly that which highlights connections between teachers' lived experience and the ways in which they form their beliefs about their profession (Freeman, 2001). Using data from an Australian study, this paper shows that experiential knowledge formed by different kinds of L2 learning (formal, informal, childhood, adult, elective, or circumstantial bilingualism) forms a powerful resource underpinning ESL teachers' professional knowledge and beliefs about language teaching.

Introduction: Teacher Cognition

Teacher cognition research investigates the thought processes of teachers, and it rests on the assumption that teachers are "rational professionals who make judgements and decisions in an uncertain and complex environment" (Shavelson & Stern 1981, p. 456). Clark and Peterson (1986) proposed three major categories of teachers' thought processes: teacher planning, teachers' interactive thoughts and decisions, and teachers' theories and beliefs. It is the third category--teachers' theories and beliefs--that is the focus of this paper, since it "represents the rich store of knowledge that teachers have" (Clark & Peterson, 1986, p. 258), which derives from a variety of sources and which forms the basis of their internal resources for planning and conducting their teaching. Later theorists such as Fang (1996) emphasised the importance of enquiry into the emic perspectives of teachers themselves (see also Richards & Nunan, 1990; Golombek, 1998).

Teacher cognition research began to find its way into the field of language teacher education in the early 1990s, and it has gradually gathered momentum (Binnie-Smith, 1996; Borg, 2003). The cognition which is under discussion has been variously termed "teacher knowledge" (Freeman, 2002), "teachers' mental lives" (Walberg, 1977), "teacher beliefs" (Burns, 1992; Richards, 1998), beliefs, attitudes and knowledge (Woods, 1996), "conceptions of teaching" (Freeman & Richards, 1993), "conceptions of practice" (Freeman, 1996), "teachers' maxims" (Richards, 1998), "teachers' pedagogical systems" (Borg, 1998), "teachers' theories" (Borg, 1999) and "teachers' personal theories" (James, 2001). In a review of

the literature, Borg (2003) identifies sixteen such terms for teacher cognition that have been in use over the past decade.

A sub-field of teacher cognition (Andrews, 2004) is that examining what teachers know about language systems, and this is variously termed "teacher metalinguistic awareness" (Andrews, 1999), "language awareness" (Hawkins, 1999; Wright & Bolitho, 1997; James, 1992, 1999; see also Thornbury, 1997; Brumfit, 1997).

There is a growing consensus that in order to understand language teaching better, we need to know more about what teachers know, how they come to know it, and how they draw on their knowledge (Freeman & Richards, 1996; James, 2001: Freeman, 2001: Borg, 2003). Increasing recognition is being given to the personal and biographical aspects of teaching that locate what teachers do and think within their overall life experience (Goodson, 1992; Hayes, 1996; Gutierrez Almarza, 1996).

Knowledge Derived from Experience

Lortie (1975), in a influential work, described teachers "apprenticeship of observation," or the some 13,000 hours they spend as students observing their own teachers, as forming powerful imprints, which are not necessarily erased by teacher training programs. Writers in language teacher education have taken these ideas further to argue that since teachers' knowledge exists in very personal terms, it is important to recognize the impact which teachers' experiences have on the formation of their professional knowledge, beliefs, and patterns of action (Cumming, 1989; Freeman, 1992; Gutierrez Almarza, 1996; Binnie Smith, 1996; Golombek, 1998; Freeman, 2002). Teachers do not, however, simply reproduce their own experience in the classroom. However, if they are to transcend its effects, it is *reflection* on the experience (Schön, 1995; Freeman, 2002; McKay, 2002) that is critical. As Bailey et al. (1996) point out, the "apprenticeship of observation" or any other experience, will only determine our professional behaviour to the extent that we permit. A particularly useful notion for the current argument is that of Wallace (1991) who distinguished between "received knowledge" (from traditional academic sources) and "experiential knowledge" (reminiscent of Schön's 1995 "knowledge-in-action"). Wallace (1991) proposed a reflective model for teacher education in which both received and experiential knowledge lead to practice, and through reflection, to professional competence, with the important feature that the practice-reflection stages are continuous and cyclical. Wallace, like many other writers, by "experience" tends to mean "classroom experience," or that which a teacher learns on the job, and does not focus on language learning experience, as does this paper.

Despite many calls for study of the complexity of teachers' prior lives in our conception of "experience" (Freeman 1992, 1996, 2002), little attention has been paid to the role of previous language learning experience (Gutierrez Almarza, 1996). Bailey et al. (1996, 2001) are among the few who examine it. However, there is evidence that some teacher educators see L2 experience as valuable material for professional reflection, in the literature on what I term the "structured language learning experience" or SLLE. An SLLE is an encounter with L2 learning that may consist of a single lesson (Weed, 1993; Fister-Stoga & Iwata, 1992) or up to a semester's study (Flowerdew, 1998; Lowe, 1987; Waters et al., 1990; Birch, 1992). It is used as a tool in teacher education programs largely to enable trainees to see the learning process from the perspective of students and to integrate theoretical (received) and experiential knowledge. Birch (1992) outlines the benefits of the program: teachers reflected on culture shock, expectations of teaching styles, the desirable balance of fluency and accuracy, correction, and the use of L1 in class. (For other types of SLLEs incorporating reflection see Bailey et al., 1996; Campbell, 1996; Bell, 1995; McDonough, 2002).

These SLLEs are claimed to have immense value as teacher development tools, but they have many limitations. They tend to be short, based on formal class teaching at beginner level, conducted with purposes other than actually learning an L2, and posing little threat to the identity, academic success, or material advancement of the learner. They do not provoke insights into higher-level language learning,

into the development of bilingualism in its many forms, into the complex relationship between language and identity, into successful language learning beyond a basic level, or into complex linguistic and sociolinguistic comparisons. Such SLLEs are pale imitations of the complexity and richness of the real language learning experiences that many teachers bring to their work. For my purpose here, however, which is to show that L2 experience should be considered an important contributor to teacher knowledge, the literature on SLLEs forms an important justification for further inquiry in teachers' L2 experience.

What Kinds of Knowledge are Desirable for ESL Teachers?

From the many ways in which teacher knowledge has been classified, I will for the moment take Woods' (1996) distinction between declarative, or content knowledge (the "what" of teaching) and procedural knowledge (the "how" to teach it). As Woods (1996) admits, content knowledge is not easy to define non-problematically when the content is language, and still less easy when the content is also the medium of instruction, as in the adult ESL class. He frames the issue with the following questions:

- "What does the teacher need to know about language or language use in order to manage the learning of it effectively?
- Furthermore, does it need to be known consciously? For example, is having native speaker intuitions about the language necessary or sufficient?" (Woods, 1996, p. 194)

The main concern is to unravel what that content and procedural knowledge might be as it relates to language, language use, language learning and language teaching, and how that might vary between teachers with different language backgrounds.

Content Knowledge

In the field of ESL, content knowledge is clearly the teacher's knowledge of the English language. Wright and Bolitho (1997) point out that ESL teachers need to be both *proficient users* and *skilled analysts* of the English language. So the two aspects of necessary content knowledge can be considered as:

a. The teacher's ability to speak and write English as a competent user and
b. The teacher's knowledge of English from an analytical perspective: its phonology, grammar, syntax, lexical properties, generic structures, pragmatic realizations and literacy conventions.

I would suggest, however, that there is a further dimension to content knowledge in which the ESL teacher differs slightly from any other teacher. This dimension is:

0. The teacher's knowledge/experience of the acquisition of the content in formal contexts

Here the content could be considered to be *English,* or to be *a second language.* This is a crucial distinction. If (c) were considered essential by the profession, and the content is seen as *English*, then the profession would be composed entirely of non-native speaker teachers--an unlikely and indefensible proposition. However, if we take the second meaning, of knowledge arising from having formally learned the content, seen as *a second language*, then it brings us to the contention of this paper, which is that it may be valuable for all teachers to have such experiential knowledge. Non-native speakers have it by definition, and some native speaker teachers have it as well.

Why, though, should we consider it desirable for content knowledge to include experience of having learned the content? A parallel from another subject area may help to make this proposition clearer. Teachers of biology must have acquired knowledge about biology *as learners* in order to teach it. They may have learned it a long time ago, in a different educational context, but they have essentially travelled

the same route as their students, going from a state of knowing little of the subject matter to a state of expertise in it. They will also have learned it formally, after early childhood, when there is a strong likelihood that the experience of learning is at least potentially accessible for reflection. It is not possible to have "biology-as-a-first-language," so the content has inevitably been learned in a conscious way.

The ESL teacher will have learned English either as a first language, and be a native speaker (NS), or will have learned it as a second language, and be a non-native speaker (NNS). The NS teacher's learning of English as a first language took place in early childhood, is unavailable for reflection and is considered by most SLA researchers to be of a very different nature from learning a second language as an adult. If such teachers are monolingual, they do not have direct experience of what students are learning (adult language learning). There is virtually no other subject in which the teacher does not have the experience of learning the content in the same way as the student. In science, in mathematics, in research methods, in driver education, in management education or in any subject we could name *except second language learning*, the teacher has been *a conscious learner of the content* before undergoing training to impart it to a new generation of learners.

If the teachers have learned English post-childhood (i.e., are non-native speakers), they have direct experience of what students are doing, in task and content. If the teachers' first language is English, but they have learned another language post-childhood, they have experience of the task (learning a language as an adult) with slightly different content (a second language, but not English). So the NNS teacher is the most directly comparable with our teacher of biology, as is shown in the following points:

- NNS teachers have learned the *same* content (English) *in the same way* as their students.
- NS bilingual teachers knows the *same* content (English) but have acquired it *in a different way* (first language acquisition), and have learned *different* content (a second language) *in a similar way*, to their students.
- NS monolingual teachers know the *same* content (English) but have acquired it *in a different* way (first language acquisition). The monolingual teacher's experience of learning *any* language is in babyhood, and the process of learning is not accessible for examination by the speaker.

We can also propose a further type of content knowledge:

d. Knowledge of a second language and second language use.

If (c) is knowledge gained *from the process of* consciously learning a second language, then (d) is that knowledge *as a result of* having learned another language. This may be the result of the process in (c) learning another language as a conscious endeavour, or it may be the result of early bilingualism, in which case the experience of learning it (c) will probably not be accessible for reflection.

The language itself, however, *is* accessible as an available source for comparison and contrast with English, giving the L2 speaker (NS or NNS) insights into similarities to and differences from English: in other words, the potential for performing cross-linguistic comparison. The ESOL teacher competencies examined in Ellis (2004a) state that it is desirable for teachers to understand the structure of the subject matter *and its relationship to other areas of knowledge* (Hogan. 1994, Appendix A - emphasis added). These other areas of knowledge are not specified, but it is reasonable to suggest that in the case of English, they might include other languages.

A further aspect of (d) is that if the second language is, or has been, regularly used, speakers may have experience of "bilingual language use." That is, they may have personal experience of differential proficiency in domains or macroskills, and of code-switching. They may also have access to affective aspects of bilinguality, such as bilingual identity, life in a bilingual family, and related issues of the rearing and education of bilingual or monolingual children. These two points are relevant to the New Zealand draft teacher competency statement discussed in Ellis (2004a, 2003), that "teachers should

have an understanding of bilingualism" (Haddock, 1998, p. 6).

Which Kinds of Knowledge are Australian ESL Teachers Expected to Have?

The kinds of knowledge discussed in the previous section can be divided into two categories:

Those required by the profession (Wright & Bolitho, 1997):

    a. Proficient user knowledge
    b. Skilled analyst knowledge

and those which are not currently required by the profession:

    c. Knowledge/experience of formal learning of the content (English *or* a second language)
    d. Knowledge of a second language.

Although there is some debate about the relative strengths and weaknesses of native (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) teachers as proficient users and skilled analysts (Forman, 1994; Medgyes, 1994; Årva & Medgyes, 2000; Ellis, 2002; Pavlenko, 2003; Garvey & Murray, 2004), in Australia and other English-speaking countries it is regarded as indispensable to having native or near-native proficiency. Ability to analyse the language is also seen as essential, at least as evidenced by having undertaken an approved training course, and as reflected in statements of required teacher competency (Hogan, 1994; Ellis, 2004a).

There remain the questions of (c) knowledge/experience of formal learning of the content: a second language and (d) proficiency in a second language. Here (c) is the *process* of learning, while (d) is the *product*, or the *result* of successful learning. The NNS has direct experience of both of these, as does the bilingual NS. The monolingual NS teacher of ESL has neither (c) knowledge/experience of learning another language (the process), nor (d) proficiency in another language (the product). Further, in his or her knowledge type (b) (knowledge of the structure and properties of English) monolingual teachers are constrained by knowing nothing else with which to compare it. They know what is English, but not what is "not-English." As Hawkins (1999, p. 128) puts it, with apologies to Kipling:[1] "What should they know of English, who only English know?", making the point that in order to fully know a thing, we need to be able to compare it with other similar things, in order to perceive its unique characteristics, its shared characteristics, and its boundaries. Some features of English are held in common with all languages, some are held in common with some languages but not others, and some are unique to English. The monolingual teacher is not in a position to make judgements about these, nor therefore about the boundaries of the subject content and the possible prior knowledge of the learners. Such knowledge can also be gained from studying comparative linguistics, but this is generally not an element of Australian TESOL teacher training.

It is (c) and (d) thatare not required by the profession for the purposes of entering pre-service education or for employment as an ESL teacher, and hence, as I have argued, they remain unexamined in theory or practice. I also argue that it is precisely these--the experience of learning a second language, and the knowledge of a second language--that is likely to be a rich source of *insights* which might contribute to teachers' beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (Woods, 1996) about language learning. I argue therefore that it is imperative to attempt to understand the nature of teachers' experience in learning languages and of being proficient users of more than one language, in an attempt to see where this knowledge and experience fits into their repertoire as teachers of ESL. Table 1 shows the likely consequences of certain broad types of language background in tabular form.

    Table 1--Content knowledge of teachers with NS, NNS, bilingual, monolingual experience*

Broad type of experience	NS early bilingual[2] Type 1	NS late bilingual Type 2	NS monolingual Type 3	NNS early bilingual Type 4	NNS late bilingual Type 5
Content knowledge					
(a) a proficient user of English/td>	Yes, by definition	Yes, by definition	Yes by definition	Yes, has to be to enter profession	Yes, has to be to enter profession
(b) a skilled analyst of English	Yes, by training	Yes, by training	Yes, by training	Yes, by training	Yes, by training and own learning experience
(c) experienced in learning of a second language	Yes, a LOTE [3] but experience may not be accessible	Yes, a LOTE	No	Yes, English but experience may not be accessible	Yes, English
(d) a proficient user of a second language	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Shaded areas are knowledge types required by the profession for employment as an ESL teacher in Australia.					

Table 1 shows how teachers with bilingual, monolingual, native English-speaking, and non-native English-speaking backgrounds have, or do not have, the kinds of content knowledge outlined earlier in this section. Knowledge types (a) and (b) are required of all teachers to meet the standards set by the profession (indicated by shading). It is knowledge types (c) and (d) which are *not* currently required by the profession, which are the concern of this paper. A non-native speaker late bilingual and a native speaker late bilingual will have command of all four knowledge types. NS and NNS early bilinguals will have four, but their experience of learning (c) may not be consciously accessible, if it took place in childhood. The monolingual English-speaking teacher, however, will only have access to two out of four types of knowledge, lacking those in (c) and (d) which derive from experience. The question of whether this matters is the focus of this paper.

It is important to note that Table 1 shows the differential knowledge and experience that may accrue to ESL teachers of differing language learning backgrounds. This tabulation of possible differences is based on the teacher cognition literature reviewed thus far, and on the arguments in the previous sections about the nature of experiential knowledge. The table attempts to clarify commonalities and distinctions across a range of backgrounds, in a broader way than has hitherto been the case. Key differences in language background have either been framed by other authors as native-/non-native speaker teacher differences (Årva & Medgyes, 2000; Ellis, 2002), or, sometimes, as bi/multilingual/monolingual teacher differences (Forman 1994, Garvey & Murray, 2004). This paper attempts to go further by proposing a more complex (but hypothetical) framework, shown in Table 1. This hypothetical framework is then used to examine the richness and multiplicity of language learning experiences revealed by the teachers in the study.

A Framework for Examining Teachers' Knowledge and Beliefs

All the constructs mentioned in the literature in teacher cognition, as internal cognitive processes, are by

nature unobservable and subject to being differently defined by different researchers. As yet there is little consensus on the various uses of the terms (Borg, 2003). Freeman's characterization of the "**knowledge, beliefs and perceptions** that shape what teachers know, and therefore what they do, in their teaching" is intended to include all the epistemological categories used in researching teacher education, and he cites Clark and Peterson (1986) and Clandinin and Connelly (1987) to support his argument (Freeman, 1994, p. 182).

For the study reported here, however, these three words do not seem to allow sufficient room for discussion of teachers' language biographical experience and how it might contribute to their "professional knowledge." I therefore propose that the following terms are most useful: **knowledge, beliefs and insights.** *Knowledge*, after Woods (1996, p. 195) is "things we 'know' - conventionally accepted 'facts' which we hold to have been demonstrated, or at least to be demonstrable", for example *English has articles whereas Bahasa Indonesia does not.* Beliefs, after a modified version of Woods (1996, p. 195) are the "acceptance of a proposition . . . for which there is accepted disagreement." for example, *ESL students need explicit focus on grammar as well as communicative practice.*

The third component is one that incorporates Clandinin and Connelly's (1987, p. 490) "personal practical knowledge: knowledge which is experiential, embodied, and reconstructed out of the narratives of a teacher's life" and which I term *insights*. An insight is an understanding gained from personal experience that allows us to see how previously understood realities could be different. It illuminates something previously unseen, makes sense of something previously incomprehensible, or lends a new perspective on something taken for granted. It is the meeting-place of knowledge, beliefs, and experience. For example, a person who has knowledge of the criminal justice system, and holds certain beliefs about crime and punishment, and who visits a prison for the first time, may find that the visit results in insights that interact with existing knowledge and beliefs and change, modify, or reinforce them. Knowledge may be seen in a new light, and beliefs may be strengthened or questioned. A sociolinguistic example is of a person who grows up in Australia speaking a first language other than English and encountering English for the first time at primary school, and who will have different insights about language, about family and about schooling than a person who grew up speaking English from birth. If both of those people then enrol in a TESOL course and study second language acquisition and bilingualism, we might expect the insights derived from their experiences to interact differently with the theoretical knowledge they gain from lectures and from reading, and hence influence the formation of their professional beliefs. It is clear that different language experiences will result in different insights, many of which may be useful to ESL teachers.

The question we need to ask then, is: *What kind of insights about language and language learning, arising from what kinds of language experiences, might be useful to ESL teachers in the development of their professional knowledge and beliefs?*

The structured language learning experiences reviewed above suggest that there is *some* recognition that language learning experience contributes *something* to the knowledge base of ESL teachers, but there is as yet no systematic investigation of what that something may be.

During formal teacher education, teachers are expected to acquire "knowledge" about phonology, syntax, bilingualism, learner motivation etc. They are also expected to develop beliefs about propositions within language learning, for example, whether systemic functional grammar is more useful in teaching writing than is traditional grammar. The development of insights *may* form part of a formal program, often in the form of a structured approach to reflection on practice (McKay, 2002). This study, however, contends that insights gained from personal experience, particularly language learning experience, are of a different nature from the knowledge and beliefs gained in formal teacher education, but that they interact with them. This proposition is consistent with, but expands upon, Wallace's (1991) notion of "experiential knowledge." It is also consistent with Freeman's (1996) calls for inclusion of the "storied or narrative nature" of teachers' past experiences, including their life histories.

Language teacher educators, then, are beginning to recognise the complex, interwoven, multi-sourced and changing nature of what teachers "know." Many researchers agree that classroom teaching and learning experience is at least as influential a source of knowledge as academic training (Wallace, 1991; Lortie, 1975; Bailey et al., 1996). There are calls for more investigation of teachers' life histories (Fang, 1996), of the personal, biographical and historical aspects of teaching (Goodson, 1992), practical knowledge based on teachers' unique experiences (Cumming, 1989), teachers' rich personal and educational histories (Vélez Rendón, 2002), teachers' personal, practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987; Golombek, 1998), teachers' storied, narrative histories and professional life spans (Freeman, 1996), and for ethnographies of ESOL teachers to explore their "culture" (Brumfit, 1997).

If experiential knowledge is accepted as a powerful contributor to teachers' beliefs, and *if* experiential knowledge includes not only that derived from classroom teaching and learning experience but also from life experience, then language learning experience, formal or informal, must be worthy of investigation in terms of how it influences teachers' store of knowledge and beliefs. I propose that language learning experience is a powerful shaper of insights which interact in dialectical ways with knowledge and beliefs gained from formal and informal sources.

Method

The data reported here derives from a study of 31 practising teachers of ESL to adults in Australian language centres. The aim was to explore the links between teachers' language learning background and their professional knowledge and beliefs. The study recruited teachers from three main groups:

1. Native English speakers with a second language, (Experience types 1 & 2 in Table 1)
2. Native English-speaker monolinguals, (Experience type 3 in Table 1), and
3. Non-native speakers (who are by definition bilingual, Experience types 4 and 5 in Table 1).

The researcher acknowledged from the outset that these are broad and unrefined categories, which do not reflect the real diversity of language experience, but it was important to establish them initially in order to ensure recruitment of respondents of the widest possible range of language backgrounds. Data in the form of interviews and oral language biographies was then gathered with the purpose of achieving a richer, more complex representation of language learning experience and its effect on the teachers' knowledge, beliefs and reported practices.

The study focussed on how teachers constructed and described their professional knowledge and beliefs, rather than on overt evidence of such knowledge and beliefs observed in classroom teaching. The rationale for this is as follows: Most studies of how teacher beliefs and experience relate to their *practice* are small-scale longitudinal studies in the ethnographic tradition (see, for instance, Woods, 1996; Gutierrez-Almarza, 1996; Tsui, 2003), for the very good reason that to examine teaching practice, a researcher needs to observe and document classroom teaching for some time and in a range of contexts, and this limits the number of participants in the study for practical reasons. It appeared, therefore, that there was a useful place for a study of the language experiences of ESOL teachers that cast a wider net than previous studies, to capture and examine the substance and character of different bilingual and second language learner experiences.

The Teachers

Twenty-nine of the teachers were female and two were male, and their ages ranged from early twenties to early sixties. They were recruited from seven immigrant ESL centres in four Australian cities, and their ESL experience ranged from less than one year to over twenty years. Although no claims are made as to representivity, it was clear that recruitment of volunteers resulted in a diversity of demographic profiles. Their language profiles ranged from being totally monolingual to balanced bilingualism.

A semi-structured interview was held with each teacher about his or her teaching approaches and beliefs. Wherever possible, permission was obtained to observe a class beforehand, and this assisted in linking planned questions to specific classroom incidents. The interview protocol contained 22 open-ended questions about their approaches to teaching ESL. Questions included: approaches to teaching grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary; the challenges of learning ESL for students, and the challenges of teaching ESL through the medium of English. They were asked to articulate their beliefs about languages, and how best language learning and language teaching are conducted, and to speculate as to the formative influences on their beliefs.

After the interview, a detailed language biography was elicited from each teacher about languages spoken, level of proficiency, and in what circumstances (how, when, and why) they were learned. Personal narratives about language learning and language-using were elicited, and these permitted the researcher to gain insights into the dynamic and complex nature of learning, using, forgetting, losing and in some cases re-acquiring of familial languages and/or "foreign" languages. This language biography was purposely conducted second, so that the teachers' professional knowledge and beliefs expressed in the interview were not influenced by the researcher suggesting any link with prior language learning experience. After eliciting the language biography, however, teachers were asked if the language learning they had just described had any influence on or relevance to their ESL teaching.

Since teachers reported a total shared repertoire of 114 languages, ranging from Anmatyerr (a Central Australian Aboriginal language) to Uzbek, it was clearly impossible to implement any form of objective testing of proficiency to establish a mimimal level of bilingualism. Instead teachers were asked to *describe* their own proficiency in whatever way they chose, and these descriptions formed the basis for allocation to a high, medium, and low proficiency rating for each language. The information was mapped onto a series of charts which attempted to represent the teachers' experiences from a variety of perspectives, such as age, manner, reasons for learning, affect towards the language and so on.

In creating a framework for reporting, Hamers and Blanc's broad definition of a bilingual (2000, p. 6) was used: ". . . an individual who has access to more than one linguistic code as a means of social communication," and while this is clearly a matter of judgement, the main indicator whether the teachers considered *themselves* as meeting the above definition of an L2 user, and their accounts of using an L2 bore this out. This definition allowed the researcher to allocate teachers to proficiency groupings, while still permitting a view of bilingualism as a continuum: i.e., a teacher who fell short of meeting the above definition could still be considered as "a monolingual with extended elective L2 learning experiences" and thus be compared with a monolingual with only minimal L2 contact. Other language biography data was used to classify 8 teachers as "circumstantial" and 14 as "elective" bilinguals (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994), while another 9 were found to be monolingual. However while these terms are usually used to describe *speakers*, for the analysis of the data they are more useful as descriptors of *experiences*. Hence, an immigrant may have both circumstantial and elective bilingual experience, and each of these may result in differing insights.

Analysis

The qualitative data from the interviews and biographies were analysed by recursive readings from which tentative commonalities were documented. These were then refined and clarified through "domain analysis" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 247), a process of grouping ideas or concepts to form clusters of related terms and processes, and building these towards overarching themes. Eventually a "saturation of knowledge" (Kouritzin, 2000) was achieved, meaning that common themes began to be encountered among teachers who shared various types of language learning experiences. The process was iterative and dialectic in that analysis of the interviews revealed patterns which led to adjustments in the language biography categories that had been established, a process known as progressive focussing (Tsui, 2003).

Findings

While it was anticipated that different language learning experiences would result in different knowledge, beliefs, and insights, the *nature* of these correspondences emerged from the data. I shall now look at some examples of how L2 experience figures in teachers' beliefs and reported practices in teaching. Two main aspects have been selected to represent type (c) Experience of learning an L2, and type (d) Experience of using an L2.

Experience of learning an L2 post-childhood

Insights into learning and communication strategies

Learning and communication strategies are the techniques we use from minute-to-minute to solve problems in second language use. Learning strategies are those relating to processing, storage and retrieval of input (Brown, 1994). Communication strategies are those used by non-native speakers to deal with the linguistic and pragmatic problems they encounter in interactions with native and non-native speakers of the language in question (Kasper & Kellerman, 1997). ESL teachers are now expected to train students in both (O'Malley et al., 1995; Oxford 1990).

Experience in learning strategies in an L2 usually comes from formal learning (classroom or self-directed), as learners grapple with specific tasks. Experience in communication strategies often comes more readily from naturalistic exposure to the L2, wherein the learner has a real need to speak, unlike in the sheltered environment of a language class. I have provided examples here of both formal learning and learning in a naturalistic context to show how these teachers have reflected on their own experiences and used them to inform their teaching.

Learning strategies

Anna, a NS late bilingual who had learned and taught French, gave an example of how she was able to use visualisation of the written word in French to understand what she was hearing, and to generalise from patterns. She was later able to apply this insight to her learning of West African Krio, and now encourages her learners to look for similar patterns between L1 and English.

> One of the things that helped me in French was being able to visualise words. As soon as I realised, the word 'nation' for example, it looks the same in both languages, and I realised I had to listen for 'nation' [as pronounced in French] instead of 'nation' [in English] and I transferred that to other words that had the same form, I started to be able to recognise words by mentally [making that adjustment], and with Krio it was the same thing because a lot of the pronunciation was just the distortion of the vowels. (Anna)

Colin, too, a NS BL and a highly successful language learner, has a keen awareness of his own strategies for learning new words, which he makes very explicit to his students:

> . . . like you know, you look up a word, and you learn it and then the next time you see that word you can't remember what it is, and then you've got to look it up again, and then you might remember it the next time. And [the students are] all going "oh yeeeees," and that's my way of saying to them "I know what it's like--I don't expect you to hear a word today and remember it for ever because I know that it doesn't work like that--if it doesn't work that way for me it's not going to work that way for you." (Colin)

An example of learning strategies used in a naturalistic context comes from Pamela, a NS late bilingual

who learned Spanish in Bolivia and practised speaking encounters in her head before going out to the shops:

> . . . then when I went to Bolivia ... I would learn new vocab, I had a list I had to learn 10 words a day at one stage, things like that--[I'd] rehearse what I was going to say by working it out (Pamela)

Later she relates how she advises her students to use similar preparation techniques before a service encounter, mentally going through vocabulary related to the topic and rehearsing requests.

Communication strategies

Beatrice, a NS elective bilingual, described herself as a "boots and all" user of French in contrast to her husband's more cautious approach, during the year they spent living in France:

> . . . so I got all the language practice, and it was a habit that we easily fell into. He was a sort of learner, unlike me, I would just would vault in and even if I didn't have the words, or I'd just paraphrase, if I didn't have the grammar doesn't matter. If I wanted to get my message across I was in, feet and all. My husband was the sort who felt he wanted to sit back and absorb the language and then . . . he started speaking. (Beatrice)

Beatrice here is describing her tendency to be "a risk-taker" in communicating with French speakers, and her husband's preference for listening and absorbing before attempting to speak. Her use of paraphrase and mime enabled her to convey meaning even when her linguistic resources were lacking. Experience of both of these approaches is very likely to be useful to Beatrice in recognising the differing approaches her students take to communicating in L2, and recommending that they "take risks" (Brown, 1994).

Experience of the medium of instruction not being L1

The vast majority of ESL classes in English-speaking countries are conducted in the target language, even for beginners. This practice places demands on teachers to devise ways of elucidating meaning and structure, and places heavy demands on students to listen and practise during long periods with no recourse to L1. Teachers may underestimate the challenge that such ESL classes place on learners; one reason why the Structured Language Learning Experience (Birch, 1992; Lowe, 1987) is seen as a valuable tool in teacher training courses. Teachers who have personal experience of learning where L1 is not the medium of instruction, have, therefore, a much better basis for understanding the real nature of the challenge for their learners.

Two of the native-speaker elective bilinguals had experience of L2-medium instruction in university contexts in Australia. Anna found her first experience of direct-method Japanese quite easy, but a second course with a teacher who talked constantly left her angry and frustrated. She concluded that the skills of the teacher are an important factor in teaching via the target language. Paula, also a native-speaker elective bilingual, who was studying second-year university Spanish during the year of interview, found she could cope well with Spanish as the medium of instruction, but opined that in her first year (which was taught in English) she would not have coped:

> I would **not** have [had] a **clue** what they were talking about--and that's the situation of low level learners [in our ESL classes]. (Paula)

For Rebecca, a NNS late bilingual, a big change occurred when she entered high school in Hong Kong. She had previously studied English as a foreign language, but at high school the teaching medium was

English. She found the sudden transition very hard to deal with initially, but eventually got used to it and found her English improved rapidly:

> . . . It is hard. It was hard the first year, but then afterward I gradually started adjusting and then I learned a lot more. I suspect that my English was built up much faster then, of course using it as a medium to learn, you're just using it all the time. (Rebecca).

Rebecca has the same kind of learning experience--having to use English with no recourse to her L1--as her students, and she can draw on this experience to anticipate her students' difficulties.

Here I have looked at just two aspects of experience type (c), experience of *learning* an L2. These were experience in learning and communication strategies and experience in learning where the medium of instruction was not L1. I will now go on to give examples from the data of experience type (d), experience in *using* an L2.

Experience of using an L2

I have selected examples from the data that are characteristic of (but not exclusive to) experience type 1 (NS early bilingual) and type 4 (NNS early bilingual). These are linguistic aspects of migration, code-switching and bilingual identity. Examples here are from both early and late bilingual experience.

Experience of linguistic aspects of migration

Seven teachers in the study had experience of migration to an English-speaking country (Australia); 4 as young children and 3 as adults. The first 4 now consider themselves NS of English and the latter 3 as highly-accomplished but still NNS. Another teacher (Helena) was born in Australia of immigrant parents, and, as she did not encounter English until she went to school, shared many of the experiences of the child immigrants. These included encountering English for the first time on entering school, feeling different from the rest of Australian society, feeling ashamed of immigrant parents, dissociating themselves from their L1 and later feeling regret at loss or attrition of the L1 (subtractive bilingualism).

The child immigrants, however, seemed to see their experience as being important in helping them to relate empathetically to their ESL students. Simone, for instance, recalls being unable to speak English when she arrived, and feeling different from the other children:

> . . . like when I couldn't speak English because my parents had just [arrived in Australia]. Well we never went to kindergarten and I could understand it [English] but I couldn't really speak it, because we had four children so we mostly played together and occasionally with the neighbours' kids or something. So I didn't really have much exposure to English, apart from shopping with my mother and things like that, so when I went to school, although I could understand it I really--I spent the first 6 months learning it. So I sort of can relate to the fact of having to learn a language as a second language in another country . . . I understand the migrant perspective. (Simone)

Ofra remembers herself and her sisters translating for her Polish-speaking mother with the neighbours. She also remembers the shame she felt on her parents' behalf.

> ... the fact that Mum and Dad were (long pause) wogs[4] when we were young, and had heavy accents, and were laughed at by the Australians. I guess it makes me very sympathetic and patient . . .(Ofra)

The immigrant experiences of these teachers place them in a position to understand and empathise with

the experience of their immigrant students, and Auerbach (1993, p. 28) values this as "understandings that come through shared life experience and cultural background" and which, she maintains, cannot be imparted through training.

Code-switching

Code-switching is now seen as the creative and complex response of a person to the cognitive and social resources of bilingualism, rather than as compensating for a linguistic gap, and it is acknowledged as having many facets (Myers-Scotton, 2003). The very normality of code-switching as part of bilingual life is indicated in the talk of Rebecca, a Cantonese/English speaker and a NNS late bilingual. Asked which of her languages is dominant, she answers:

> . . . my children both speak English a lot of the time at home, and then if I want to get things done quickly it's English. Not that they're naughty, but they do find it harder to grasp if I speak Cantonese to them, so they'll take a minute to work out what I want them to do. But if I speak English they immediately know what I want. And at home is half half. My husband speaks Cantonese with me, but then we do throw in English words every now then, for convenience. . . (Rebecca)

Rebecca's account suggests that she sees code-switching as something purposeful and strategic, based on her interlocutor, pragmatic purpose and domain (Romaine, 1995). English is more successful than Cantonese for getting her children's compliance, and while she speaks mainly Cantonese with her husband, they find it "convenient" to use English to express work-related lexical items. Rebecca was the only teacher in the study who was involved in bilingual teaching of ESL (in English and Cantonese), and she took a keen professional interest in the purposes for which her students used L1 in the classroom. It is not unreasonable to suggest that this interest might be informed by her own experience of the efficacy of using two languages for getting things done.

Bilingual identity

Learners of ESL are not just learning English. They are learning to function in a second language, but in most cases they will continue to use L1 as well as English, and hence code-switching (above) will be a significant feature of their everyday language use (Ellis, 2004b). They must learn, too, to be "participants" in English linguaculture (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000) and join an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991) of "multicompetent, bilingual and multilingual speakers" (Pavlenko, 2003). This often means they must construct new identities that permit them to take a place in the new society and assert themselves in a new language so that they can claim the right to be heard (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 1997). Teachers who have experienced this process of having to construct a second-language or bilingual identity are, I argue, much more likely to understand their learners' needs and difficulties in learning to function in English and negotiate L1/L2 use.

Shanaz, who grew up with two languages and cultures, travelling frequently between her parents' countries, explains that her biculturality and her languages are important parts of who she is:

> I grew up very much biculturally. It's about a very deep level of acceptance, and to understand that there is that difference [between two cultures]. And that languages are very much related to thought processes, and therefore it's very important to retain them in order to have those different modes that are part of who you are. (Shanaz)

Simone, too, talked about how, as a balanced bilingual with a native-like command of English who feels Australian, she nonetheless feels her two languages give her a slightly different identity:

I understand the migrant perspective because I still in a sense . . . I mean I feel like I'm an Australian, just not connected to Europe at all but I do have that . . . you can't help it, you've got that background, that sort of duality, yeah. (Simone)

While the above responses suggest an enhanced identity through bilingualism, it is well recognised that immigrants often suffer a loss of identity as a functioning and competent adult (see, for example, Norton-Peirce, 1995) and need to learn how to reconstruct themselves as a person with a right to speak. Fiona, a NS late bilingual who spent some years living in Uzbekistan, gives a poignant example of how she lost her "right to speak" and was regarded as childlike because of her imperfect grasp not only of the language but also of everyday household matters such as food storage:

. . . [The Uzbeks] have fermented cabbage, you know, like the Koreans do? With chilli and stuff? They have that as well, and they wanted me to go and put it back in the thing [barrel] and I wasn't sure what I was supposed to do, and I went back and said "I'm sorry, I don't know what to do," and they thought I was an idiot. I've had people talk to me like I was two years old, and all of those things which our students experience as well. (Fiona)

All of the teachers in the study teach adult students who are in the process of becoming bilingual through learning English. They too have faced the challenges of immigration and the resultant threats to their identity. Many of them have children who are coping with education in a new language and who perhaps are beginning to lose interest in their L1. So a teacher who has experiential knowledge of what it means to live as a bilingual, as an individual and in a bilingual family, as expressed by (d) "knowledge of the use of a second language," has a much richer basis for achieving key teacher competencies such as "can understand that learning a second language is part of the process of becoming bicultural . . . can utilise bilingual assistance effectively in a range of situations" (Hogan, 1994, pp. 9-10) or ". . . have an understanding of bilingualism" (Haddock, 1998, p. 6).

Conclusion

This paper has argued that research into language teacher cognition has not yet adequately investigated the role which second language learning experience plays in the formation of ESOL teachers' professional knowledge and beliefs. The study reported here shows some of the ways in which different language learning experiences can lead to the development of key insights on which teachers appear to draw in framing their approach to learners. I set out to show that in general the TESOL profession requires that teachers be proficient *users* of English and skilled *analysts* of English (knowledge types (a) and(b), Table 1). I have then concentrated on the types of knowledge *not* required by the profession: type (c), experiential knowledge of *learning* an L2 and (d), experiential knowledge of *using* an L2. I have drawn from data that suggest that these are developed in complex combinations by early and late bilingualism, and by formal and informal language learning.

Early bilingualism was found to result in insights into linguistic aspects of migration such as L1 loss and developing a bicultural identity. Both early and late bilinguals could appreciate the normality of code-switching as part of bilingual life. Late bilingualism through formal language learning gave teachers direct experience of learning and communication strategies in L2, and, for the non-native speakers, this experience took place with English, directly mirroring their students' experiences. Both native and non-native late bilinguals could recall the impact of being in a classroom where L1 was not the medium of instruction, and could discuss the consequences of this for beginners and more advanced learners.

I will conclude by briefly contrasting the experiences of the monolingual ESOL teacher. She has little or no experience in employing learning and communication strategies in an L2. This teacher must take as a matter of trust which strategies are likely to be useful, saying in effect "I have never learned a second language, but I am going to teach *you* the best way of doing so." The monolingual teacher is unlikely to have insight into what it is like to migrate to an L2 environment, to suffer language attrition, and to face

the challenge of bringing up children to acquire L2 *and* maintain L1. She is unlikely to appreciate the many linguistic and interpersonal reasons for code-switching. The monolingual teacher does not know what it is like to be taught exclusively in L2, although she visits this on her students every day. She does not have experience as a learner of different learning strategies, and as with most other aspects of language teaching mentioned here, must rely on her training and reading to form her beliefs about which might work best with which learners. None of this, of course, is to suggest that monolingual teachers are not good teachers. Clearly "good teaching" is dependent on far more than the teacher's L2 learning experience. However, other things being equal, the bilingual teacher possesses far greater resources with which to make informed professional decisions than does the monolingual. All teachers need sound professional training (received knowledge (Wallace, 1991) in how languages are structured, how they are learned and how they might best be taught. It is time we also recognised the subtle interplay of experiential knowledge with received knowledge, and began to investigate further how teachers' successful language learning can contribute to their students' learning.

Notes

[1] Kipling (1892, cited in Partington, 1993) wrote in "The English Flag," "What should they know of England who only England know?"

[2] 'Early' and 'late' bilingual are not possible to define absolutely, but are often understood as the result of learning pre- and post-puberty. The key point for this paper is that the later the bilinguality occurs, the more chance there is that the experience of learning or acquiring the second language will be consciously accessible.

[] LOTE: Language Other Than English. This is the accepted term used in Australia to denote 'foreign language' in a learning or teaching context.

[] 'Wog' is a derogatory term in Australia for an immigrant of Southern European or Middle Eastern background. Common in the 1950s and 1960s, the term has been defiantly reclaimed as a self-descriptor by some second-generation immigrants. It seems that Ofra pauses to consider whether she can use the term in its new ironic sense when for her it still embodies the old insult.

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About the Author

Liz Ellis is a lecturer in the Languages, Cultures and Linguistics department of the University of New England, Australia. Her research interests are in bilingual teachers and teacher education. She has extensive background in training ESOL teachers in Australia and internationally.

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