MA IN LEARNING AND
TEACHING PROCESSES
IN SECOND LANGUAGES

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"Learning and Teaching Processes in Second Languages": What is Behind the Name, Really?

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"Learning and Teaching Processes in Second Languages": What is Behind the Name, Really?

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Abstract

One item that has raised a number of questions from the moment the ML2 Project started is the name of the program, both in terms of its length and its actual meaning. At ML2, we have proposed the name, rather than a mere denomination, as a blueprint that helps faculty and students guide their curriculum and research decisions. This paper intends to offer a more detailed explanation of what the name entails and how it is weaving with our curriculum at large. A brief historical overview of the program's creation and the decisions made regarding the name introduces the deconstruction of the two key elements of the name, learning and teaching processes and second languages. A brief sample of how these ideas materialize in some of the syllabi follows the initial description.

Introduction: "What's in a name?"

In Romeo and Juliet, William Shakespeare (1597/1900) wrote, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose/By any other name would smell as sweet" (p. 1892). Although the Bard's declaration usually holds true, sometimes the answer to the initial question is, "*Everything* is in a name." In the past, graduate programs in English education in Colombia seemed to rely on narrower notions of English didactics and English as a "foreign language." Therefore, problematizing certain contemporary issues related to the defintions (Graddol, 2006; Mora, 2015c) and roles for English (Pennycook, 2001) in a globalized world (Blommaert, 2010) may just be emerging in their curricula.

In 2012, when our University commissioned the creation of a new master's program in language education, we faced the dilemma of naming it. Should we take the traditional route? What kind of alternatives do we want to offer? We knew that we wanted something that would differentiate itself from the other related programs in our city and Colombia. We did not want just a label, but a blueprint for our curricular orientation. After conferring with local and international colleagues, we agreed to name this program MA in Learning and Teaching Processes in Second Languages[1] (we informally use the acronym "ML2" to also refer to our program). This two-year, research-oriented program, provides in-service teachers with an epistemological orientation about the English language that aligns with the current views of English as an international language from critical applied linguistics (Pennycook, 2001), literacy (Luke, 2004), bilingual education (Higgins, 2009), linguistic human rights (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), and critical pedagogy (Darder, 2003; Kubota, 2004; Pavlenko, 2004).

This paper provides a glimpse of our program, returning to the initial question about "What's in a name" to actually explain what is in our name. We will first provide a historical overview of the beginnings of ML2. Then, we will weave the deconstruction of our name's components (i.e. Learning and Teaching Processes and Second Languages) with samples from our course syllabi that exemplify how these ideas materialize in our curriculum.

The Genesis of a Program: Moments of Convergence and Serendipity

Chartering a graduate program, as we have learned, sometimes requires the convergence of different factors. ML2, as it exists today, is an initiative that has morphed since 2009. The first proposal decided to build the program relying on three factors: (a) the academic tradition from the Graduate Specialization[2] in ELT, (b) the critical mass of alumni interested in pursuing their master's degree, and (c) a response to the University's advanced education expansion project (Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, 2005). The initial idea began as a research emphasis in the existing Master's in Education called "Teaching Processes Focused on the Learning of English as a Foreign Language" (Martínez, Jaramillo, & Vallejo, 2011).

This initial proposal began morphing around August, 2011. The lead author (Raúl) was hired as a tenure-track Assistant Professor and was assigned to help revise the initial proposal. However, at the beginning of 2011, our School of Education and Pedagogy was awarded a grant from the Ministry of

[1] The original (and official, per Ministry of Education purposes) name of the program is Maestría en Procesos de Aprendizaje y Enseñanza de Segundas Lenguas. However, for all related issues to the English Emphasis, we use the name in English.
[2] In Colombia, a Specialization degree goes beyond the bachelor's but below the master's, providing deeper professional development via a degree program.

2

Education to transform the Graduate Specialization in Literature into a master's program. Winning the grant generated had a ripple effect across our graduate program, leading our Dean at the time to forego the initial idea and instead develop a stand-alone master's program. With this change, we reorganized the design team, with Raúl now leader of the now called "ML2 Project". The design team worked on the ML2 Project proposal, which featured two research emphases on English and Spanish as second languages[3] , between August 2011 and June 2012. The University's Academic Council approved our proposal in November, 2012, the National Ministry of Education followed suit at the end of January, 2013, and we welcomed our first cohort on August 2, 2013. As of this writing, we have three cohorts at varying levels of progress. Several students have successfully defended their theses and will graduate before year's end.

The Program at Large: A Brief Description

The current of the program (currently under revision) comprises 49 credits (classes count for either two [24 instructional hours] or three [36 instructional hours] credits), divided among 16 courses and four academic areas, as illustrated below:

Table 1.

ML2's Curricular Structure

Curricular Area	Courses by Area
Humanistic Education	• Humanistic Education Seminar • Ethics Seminar
Conceptual & Contextual Foundations	• Introduction to English Academic Discourse • Politics, Administration and Management in Education • Reconceptualizing and Recontextualizing Learning and Teaching Processes • Evaluation in Second Language Contexts • Autonomy Education for Critical Thinking
Language Emphasis	• English Language I: Issues and Trends in Second Language Acquisition • English Language II: Literacies in Second Languages • English Emphasis I: Interculturality, Multilingualism, Diversity • English Emphasis II: Socio-Critical Approaches in Second Languages

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[3] Although this chapter will zero in on the English Emphasis, it is important to point out that all the conceptual and epistemological tenets outlined in the chapter are akin to both emphases.

	• English Emphasis III: Global Issues and Trends in English as a Second Language
Research	• Research Seminar I
	• Research Seminar II
	• Research Seminar III
	• Research Seminar IV

A Name as a Transition toward Additional/International Languages: Learning and Teaching Processes in Second Languages

Building the program was an arduous but rather speedy process. *Naming* the program, however, turned out to be slightly more painful. Despite our clear idea for the program's orientation, our choice of a lengthy name raised questions. The name changed from Teaching Processes Focused on the Learning of English as a Foreign Language in 2011 to Learning for Teaching Processes of a Second Language during the design stage to Learning and Teaching Processes in Second Languages. Each version of the name implied revisiting our initial ideas to refine our proposal. As the name changed, so did our epistemological stances. One thing that remained strong, however, was our desire that ML2 would break conventional wisdom about language teachers' professional development.

All of our curriculum team had extensive teaching experience and thus we experienced first-hand some of the proposals for professional development in the English Language Teaching (ELT) community. Some of them focused on narrow views of didactics and "Recipes for Tired Teachers" (Sion, 1985). They seemed more concerned with training "passive technicians" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) than fostering "organic" (Gramsci, 1971) or "transformative intellectuals" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). ML2 has a different agenda in mind. We confront our students with this agenda from the first moment they see the name (even going through great lengths so that they all say it properly!) and we have remained consistent throughout this journey.

The remainder of this section will explain the key components of our name and how they actually constitute the conceptual and epistemological underpinnings of our program. We will bookend the explanations with vignettes (Mora, forthcoming; Stake, 2010) from the most recent syllabi comprising the five courses in the Language Emphasis Area (Language I and II; Emphasis I, II, and III) and two of the

Conceptual and Contextual Area (Reconceptualizing and Recontextualizing Learning and Teaching Processes" [R&R] and Evaluation in Second Language Contexts)

LEARNING AND TEACHING PROCESSES: CHALLENGING THE COMMUTATIVE PROPERTY

A very famous arithmetic rules is the commutative property, "In multiplication, the order of factors being multiplied does not change the product." For arithmetic, it does hold true that 3x6 will yield the same result as 6x3. However, in our reflections about teaching and learning as essential elements of the classroom equation, we realized that the order of factors actually alters the product. Quite a few graduate programs in Colombia use the names "Teaching" and "Teaching and Learning" in their titles. We decided to break that trend, talking about "learning and teaching processes" instead. We emphasize "processes" as awareness that learning is an ongoing event with different stages, both in formal education and more casual training scenarios. As we changed the wording, we also wanted to change teachers' foci. We worried whether talking about "teaching and learning" might develop a causality relationship that would not assume any learning without teaching. We also wondered if this relationship would force teachers to remain entrenched in instrumental views of their craft, where hoarding techniques and activities trumps reflecting on what lies beneath the immediate classroom practice.

Our proposal develops a consciousness that although learning and teaching second languages imply instrumental moments of execution, they are founded upon theories and conceptual trends at the volitive, cognitive, and emotional dimensions (Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, 2012). These dimensions are socially situated under very particular circumstances and features (Kumaravadivelu, 1993; Gee, 2008; Puren, 1998; Street, 2013). Talking about "learning and teaching processes" invites teachers to engage in moments of reflexivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Mora, 2011, 2012, 2014d, under review) and conscientização (Freire, 1979; Mora, 2014a) about their practice. Our curriculum has framed those spaces of reflexivity under two questions, as follows:

What does it mean to learn a language? As language teachers, we all have struggled at some point in our careers with losing our sensitivity toward our students' struggles with that second language. Maybe because we are "native speakers" or we have faced very different learning conditions (such as pursuing a graduate degree abroad), sometimes we forget what being a learner feels like. When we place learning before teaching in our name, we want to trigger a deeper conversation about what it means to learn languages today, in light of the new questions (Usma, 2009) and trends (Álvarez, 2014; Lantolf, 2011) related to language acquisition (Atkinson, 2011; Reihardt, 2012; Van Patten & Benati, 2010).

What does it mean to learn a language *in order to teach it*? This second question engages our students into a much deeper reflexivity about what we take for granted (or not) when teaching languages. This question reminds teachers that, regardless of their level (however they define or measure it), they

cannot assume they know the language. The question provides a fresh reminder that learning about a language becomes a necessary precursor to teaching it. It also helps break traditional imaginaries that sometimes default native speakers as better teachers (Mora & Muñoz Luna, 2012). In addition, as Mora (2015b) explained,

This is a question that invites us to look more closely at the different pedagogical and didactic methods and approaches already available and look at the more critically. It invites questions about their relevance in light of these new contexts for language use and it requires teachers to think more carefully about what didactics is really supposed to mean: Not the application of activities and workshops, but a careful consideration of your pupils' needs and realities as the first step toward designing activities that reach out to them in more meaningful ways. (pp. 8-9).

Learning and Teaching Processes: Samples from the English emphasis. Two core issues that link our courses to our transformative view of learning and teaching appeared in our reading of the different syllabi:

Teachers should confront old and new schools of thought in language education. Our courses rely on the idea that without these confrontations, real transformation cannot take place. The course "English Language I: Issues and Trends in SLA" (Bedoya, 2015) includes a discussion about the need to look at ICTs in our classes through research,

ICT mediated language learning tasks and environments enjoy nowadays popularity and recognition among L2 researchers, teachers and learners. The extant research shows strong evidence that well planned ICT mediated instruction may be conducive to successful language learning. In our third and fourth sessions we will explore some theoretical and practical aspects concerning the integration of ICT mediated activities into the L2 curriculum. We will also review some successful teaching and learning experiences that will frame our discussion on potential new ICT integration projects

The confrontation between the old and new is a central issue of the course "English Language II: Literacies in Second Languages." In the course description, Mora (2015a) explains,

Literacy and what we mean by it has suffered a number of changes over the years. Whether your definition is simply reading or writing or a more encompassing idea such as "the process of interpreting and creating text using multiple means and media, including technology, multiple languages, and diverse aesthetic forms of expression, in addition to the written and spoken word", talking about literacy is a contentious issue.

The course "Evaluation in Second Language Contexts" (Martínez, 2015) continues this confrontation. Martínez argues that "Chang[ing] the traditional conception and perception of assessment

so that it can be differentiated from grading and other practices" is a necessary first step towards "reveal[ing] the continuities and discontinuities in the evaluation process (as a system) and activate the second language learning processes." Of course, such transformations are never an easy step to take, as Anderson (2015) in his iteration of "English Emphasis III", which focused on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), explained,

> You may find that, in many ways, CLIL represents a very different kind of approach to teaching and learning than other approaches with which you are already more familiar. You may wonder whether it is possible to apply CLIL approaches to your current teaching context. Such questions and concerns are normal when we begin learn about what is, in many respects, an often different and still new approach to learning and education. Equally, at the same time, you will find that CLIL draws on many practices and methodologies that are already familiar to you.

Language learning and teaching processes are multidimensional and interdisciplinary. Our curriculum highlights an interdisciplinary perspective for our notions about language learning and teaching. For instance, both iterations of the course "English Emphasis I: Interculturality, Multilingualism, Inclusion" since 2013 remind us that talking about learning and teaching today should incorporate a socio-cultural approach. In the first version of this course titled "Language, Culture, and Power," Golovátina-Mora (2014) posited,

> The course aims at reflecting over two questions: who is teaching and what do we teach when teaching the languages? The focus will be made on the subject of culture as part of language teaching and the role of language in the social construction of reality. The idea is to propose an interdisciplinary background for understanding the process of the language learning and teaching.

> In her version of the course titled, "Critical Pedagogy and Cultural Politics," Roca-Servat (20150) engages the discussion of language learning from the vantage point of

> Critical theory and cultural studies. From a critical theory standpoint, the production of knowledge, the means of authority and power relations influence the learning process. A process that should consider the importance of agency as an act of participating in shaping the world in which we live (Giroux, 2013).

> Álvarez (2015) also invites students to assume this critical, interdisciplinary view in his proposal for R&R, transcending views of acquisition that only consider the cognitive dimension,

> While it is indeed necessary to acknowledge the relevant role that mental or cognitive process play in language development, we cannot deny the central role of other social and cultural factors in such a process […] I expect you to look at language teaching and learning as processes that go beyond aspects of linguistic development, communicative competence, skills developments among

other concerns that have governed language teaching invisibilizing and that do not allow to see the full picture of what goes on in a language class. While such aspects are relevant, we need to realize that language teaching is informed by factors such as the ones I introduced above.

Mora (2015a) also acknowledges the interdisciplinary nature of literacy within language learning and teaching,

> Part of developing one's comprehension of these debates and concepts includes the realization, as Lankshear (personal communication, 08/22/13) explained, that "many of the issues involved in the evolution of thinking about 'literacy' seem to grow out of tensions around such paradigms as pyscholinguistics, critical theory, sociocultural theory, cultural theory, sociolinguistics, and so on."

Finally, Varón Páez (2014), in her version of the course "English Emphasis III," titled "Contemporary Trends and Issues in Second Language Teaching and Learning," discussed an interdisciplinary approach to English education,

> The broad aim of the course is to restate the status of the areas surrounding language teaching and learning, which requires the analysis of the most relevant contemporary tendencies in language teaching and learning in addition to the study of a coherent theory of language, whether this comes from linguistics or from some other disciplines.

SECOND LANGUAGES: SEARCHING FOR MORE EQUITABLE FRAMEWORKS

Providing frameworks to understand languages within frameworks of justice (Ladson-Billings, 2015) and equity (Luke, 2004; Mora & Golovátina-Mora, 2011) has been a pressing matter for ML2 since the beginning. As Mora (2015b) argued,

> We now need to interrogate how ownership of a language operates in the new superdiverse (Arnaut, 2012; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011) configurations that new forms of migration and technology are providing We have to question how affinity (Black, 2009) is trumping geography as the new form for linguistic communities of practice. We also have to consider how technology and language (Mora, 2012e; 2014e; Thorne & Black, 2008) are important elements in these language ecologies we face today and how all these forms of language practice and use are forcing us to rethink policies and the way we frame languages today. (pp. 5-6)

Framing language education programs around the notion of "foreign language(s)" has been the tradition. This notion, we argue, seems to overlook more critical perspectives about, say, English today (Graddol, 2006; Mora, 2013, 2015x; Pennycook, 2001) and even some of the potential social inequalities germane to the idea of "foreign" (Mora, 2012, 2015c). Therefore, we proposed the idea of second languages

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(Mora, 2013, 2014e, 2015c; Uribe & Gómez, 2015) as our response to the traditional binary opposition of "second/foreign languages." Uribe and Gómez (2015) proposed defining second languages as,

> [C]ommunication systems present in a specific context that operate next to (sometimes with) the mother language in that location. In this sense, we recognize that while there may be a predominant language that people use in that particular place, there may be others that people use as a resource for communication. This way, second languages emerge because the context itself and its inhabitants make it happen. (Defining the Term, Paragraph 1).

Our idea of second languages, also aligns, for instance in the case of English, with ideas such as "World Englishes" (Smith, 2014), "English as a Lingua Franca" (Björkmann, 2014), or "additional language" (Thorne & Black, 2008),

> The idea of second languages is then an approximation to concepts such as additional or new languages, as it acknowledges the diversity in language learning and that speakers may adopt other languages for a myriad or reasons, while advocating that adopting a second language in one specific scenario should never come to the detriment of other languages users already possess, even their mother tongue. (Mora, 2013, p. 54)

Second Languages: Samples from English emphasis. Our curriculum invites students to revisit languages today, providing a critical view of the conditions in which it operates within and beyond the classrooms.

A revised view of languages and English questions what new sets of values we must promote and how we must understand the current conditions and frameworks. Our English Emphasis courses provide some interesting examples. In her version of "English Language I," Golovátina-Mora (2014) priorized the critical discussion of <bilingualism> (Mora, 2012). She invited her students to pay attention to how practitioners make sense of the name (Golovátina-Mora, 2013; Mora, 2012) and the local and international perspectives and implications around this idea (Baker, 2008; Canagarajah, 2002; Golovátina-Mora, 2012; Stroud, 2007). Varón Páez (2014) focused some of her discussions in "English Emphasis III" in the context of globalization (Dewey & Jenkis, 2010; Fairclough, 2006; Kramsch & Thorne, 2002; Mackay, 2004), as two of the discussion questions in her course illustrate,

- In what ways discourses, theories and practices of globalization have changed the conditions in which language learning and teaching take place in contemporary language classrooms?
- What are the main challenges imposed by the World Englishes, post modernism and post colonialism to the idea of the existence of an English native speaker?

The need for a critical view about Postmethod (Kumaravadivelu, 1994; 2001; 2003; 2006) emerged in some courses. In "English Language I," Bedoya (2015) devoted some sessions to the "discussion and

reflection about the so called postmethod era, to analyze its impact in current language teaching practices, and at the same time, to examine the relevance that L2 teachers still grant to the concept of method." In the version of "English Emphasis II: Socio-critical approaches in second languages," titled "Critical Pedagogy in Second Language Education," Areiza (2014) situated postmethod within a larger school of thought,

> Language education has increasingly been more sensitive to critical pedagogy or critical pedagogies thanks to Paulo Freire, the Frankfurt School and issues raised by Applied Linguistics (e.g. World Englishes, Colonialism, Culture and Identity, Language policies and planning, feminism, critical literacy, etc.), social constructivism and the postmethod condition. This course will explore how some critical approaches have overtly claimed to shift from a transmissionist pedagogy to a more contextualized, liberating and transformative education.

Finally, there is a sense of awareness that moving toward a more encompassing view of second languages (which, as we have argued, leans very close to ideas regarding EIL), involves a re-examination of our teaching and research methods. In the description of R&R, Álvarez (2015) discusses,

> We would examine the factors that have contributed to re-vision the idea of teaching methods, the native speaker as the model for language learning, the role of culture and other constructs. Some of the factors that I will include in this course comprise issues of identity, politics and policy and English language teaching, language teaching pedagogy, World Englishes or English around the globe, interculturality, and Computer Mediated Communication.

These re-examinations imply a new view of English teachers, not only as practitioners or researchers, but also as activists, as Mora (2015a) explained in "English Language II,"

> Today's language ecologies (Mora, 2014[c]; 2015[c]) also require us to reflect on how new technologies and the changes in policy and the world at large are merging within these theoretical conversations. In this sense, it is essential that second language researchers and practitioners be well informed and become active participants in these debates [...] The new views on literacy actually invite us to rethink learning and teaching in new and more meaningful ways. This course is, therefore, an invitation for you to become acquainted with and immersed into these conversations.

Discussion: The Road Traveled and the Road Ahead

Two years into chartering our program, we are far from finished. We are assessing our achievements in our curriculum and our ongoing research studies, while raising deeper questions to strengthen our philosophy. The curriculum review that this chapter actually triggered showed us that we

have, indeed, surpassed the usual discussions about ESL/EFL that have long plagued the field of English Education (and which have also moved to the field of Spanish Education). Our proposal of second languages, as an idea of "international/additional language in disguise," has found a very welcoming audience in our students and our faculty. Opening doors both to non-TESOL professionals in our program (such as Polina, who has a background in history and cultural studies) and scholars who have moved past TESOL into much larger fields (such as Raúl, who now confronts issues in TESOL from his background in literacy research) has become a true asset: The scholarship that these faculty members contribute makes us more interdisciplinary and thus more open to being more critical about languages in today's world.

This view of the program is also emerging in our students' master's theses. They are moving from the traditional view of just exploring the improvement of the skills into larger issues. We have studies (both finished and in progress at the time of writing this) looking at online reading comprehension, children's literacies, language policies in Colombia, social networks, metacognitive strategies, media literacy, conflict resolution, eco-tourism and English teaching, and so forth. This expanded view of research situates, in fact, our program with a larger international perspective vis-à-vis English.

English (and language) education in Colombia keeps evolving (Mora, 2014b). Larger questions and issues appear as our government envisions new and stronger roles for English and Spanish as globalizing tools, as reflected in recent policies for both languages. However, we feel that our program and our philosophy regarding English (as well as Spanish and second languages at large) will provide broader spaces to empower our students and engage in glocalized advocacy. We wish to participate in the worldwide debates about languages with the view of devising research that can impact local communities, with the hope that our work can help our practitioners and their students use languages such as English, from that view of International Language, as spaces for equity and agency. That is our dream two years into our project; that is our challenge as this decade progresses.

Author's Note

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