Learning Styles of Monolingual and Bilingual English Language Learners through Online Spanish Classrooms during Coronavirus (Covid-19) Period [In English]

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine whether monolingual achieves more Spanish proficiency or bilingual learner, using different learning styles in online classes. This study benefits a comparative case-study design through which the evaluation of learning between two Spanish learners were observed based on a case study qualitative research for each, by the teacher and finally a comparative study plays role to make any relationship or distinctness in-between. Both learners had online private Spanish classes in different countries and used different learning styles. The teacher, who was the researcher, interviewed them to achieve their needs, backgrounds, knowledge, level and also learning styles in traditional classes and compared them with those in online classes, and also compared the learners with each other in order to reach any similarities or distinctions between monolingual and bilingual learning styles. She based her syllabus and lesson plans on their needs and styles. As a result, she concluded no difference between a monolingual who used Farsi and bilingual who used English and Farsi to learn Spanish. There were commonalities in using learning styles through in-person classes and online classes but with few changes in the way of using them.

Key words: Monolingual, Bilingual, Online Classrooms, Learning Styles, Coronavirus (Covid-19).

INTRODUCTION

Being monolingual and/or bilingual has been being one of the most important and challenging issues in terms of teaching for many language teachers. Using different learning styles and strategies by the learners and knowing how to respond and give them feedback by the teachers also are the discussible points in this regard.

As education never stops, with contagion of Coronavirus during 2020 (Covid-19), many teachers and learners prefer to stay at home and have online classes in any field of education, to be safe from any harm or infection; so online classes would be their first choice (Zapalska & Brozik, 2006) to improve their education. One of the most popular fields that have been affected in this period is language teaching and learning. This causes expansion of the online education in all over the world; not just in specific places and presenting thousands of online classes for every single learner and also learners in groups. So, the policy of the authorities, institutions and teachers was to assimilate the in-person classes and online classes in order to not to lose the audience and have the same or maybe more quality in education; because many think that students learn better in face-to-face classes than online classes (Pitt & Columnist, 2020) based on sitting near to each other, having pair or group works, following the teacher, having eye contact and many other kinesthetic factors which make the learning easier.

The researcher, who was the teacher of the class, at first, studied the differences and/or similarities of two Spanish students' learning styles that are beginners, through in-person classes- by an interview- and online classes, presenting during Coronvirus (Covid-19) period and then she studied their learning styles and finally made a comparison between their levels of learning; which would be considered as a comparative case-study design.

Although the learners have different learning strategies as: cognitive, metacognitive and affective strategies that cannot be ignored in the area of language teaching and learning; what is focused here is their learning styles. There are eight known styles proposed in the field of learning that are based on the Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences presented here as: visual (spatial), aural (auditory-musical), verbal (linguistic), social (interpersonal),

logical (mathematical), physical (kinesthetic), solitary (intrapersonal) and naturalistic styles (Hoerner, 2013).

By all above, the problem stated here is the similarity or difference between the learners' styles in online classes and in-person classes that influence the process of teaching for the teachers and the differences in using learning styles by monolingual and bilingual learners in online classes.

Two adults Spanish learners were subconsciously under study: a 23-year-old Iranian monolingual male whose L1 is Farsi and knows English somehow, as his foreign language; and a 20-year-old Iranian bilingual female whose L1 are Farsi and English, as she was born and grew up in the USA and has been living and passing her school time there. The male student lives in Canada (Toronto) and the female lives in the USA (Los Angeles); both classes started on March 2020 (with two weeks interval); both online classes were run twice a week, via WhatsApp application and only few sessions via Skype through video call by the teacher in Iran; both classes were private online classes. Few confirmations like changing the class time, cancelling or sending some exercises to do by the learners were sent offline because of the time differences between countries; so the teacher after finishing the class sent few exercises for them and as soon as they got them they answered them and sent back to the teacher to check. Before getting started the first session of both classes, the teacher interviewed both learners, while a 10 minutes video call interview through WhatsApp, to know the learner's need, background, any Spanish knowledge, level of the students and more important, their interests and motivation in learning Spanish and the styles they used to use in any traditional classes; like practicing in pairs or groups (kinesthetic), listening carefully to the teacher (aural), watching the board and TV (visual) and etc. After having a background of the learners, the teacher started her teaching process regarding their needs and level which was elementary for both.

Examples of WhatsApp and Skype speeches
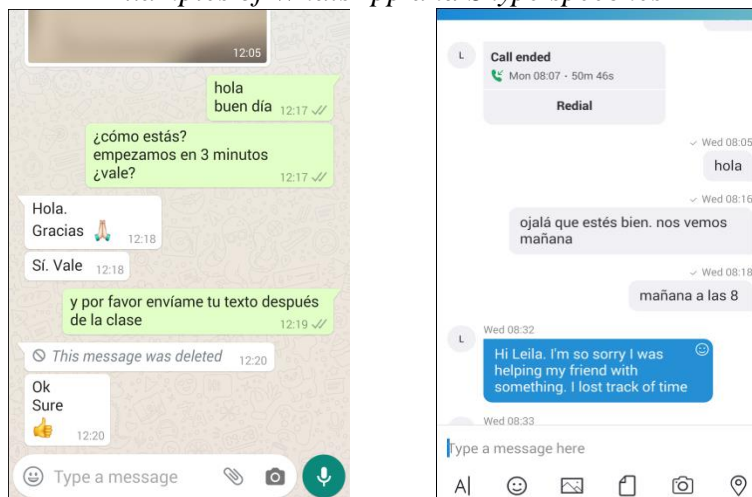
LITERETURE

Passing different language teaching eras has shown that there were lots of methods using the students' L1 (like GTM) or ignoring that (like CLT) based on the policy makers and authorities whether the teachers could deal with the current situation or not.

Today, considering the role of the teacher in the classrooms as a manager of the class, it is important to give an open hand to the teacher to make an image and a background of the learner in order to provide more suitable and practical syllabus and lesson plans corresponding to that; while education system and language planning plays great role in this regard (Martin Jones, 2007) and not all programs and plans are adequate for all types of learners (Stones, 2001).

According to Nieto (2010), teaching language to students, especially immigrants, may lead to unpleasant outcomes. So teachers should be aware of how much L1 they use in the classrooms. Sometimes being bilingual may be considered as high level person (Bruce, 2014) by other classmates or maybe by the teacher. Many of these immigrant children, because of travelling and moving among countries, become bilingual or multilingual; i.e., their parents talk to them in mother tongue (Conteh, 2015) and they learn L2 at school.

Regarding this specific study, it should be mentioned some similarities between Spanish (as a target language of the classroom) and English and Farsi (as L1 of the learners), ignoring international words and nouns, like: internet or E-Mail. English and Spanish have Latin root; so that makes many common vocabularies in-between only by different pronunciations and dictations; such as: verb (English) and verbo (Spanish) or University (English) and Universidad (Spanish) and many other verbs and words like these that even somebody who do not know them but can guess the meaning. On the other hand, there are many similarities and commonalities between Farsi and Spanish based on Arabic influence on both languages, Spanish (Gabriel.B, 2019) and Farsi (Safari, 2001), like: zeytun (Farsi) and aceituna (Spanish) which means "olive" and has Arabic root, or narenj (Farsi) and naranja (Spanish) that means "orange", although they come from different roots; Farsi is Indo-European and Spanish is Latin and both have different alphabet, orthography and writing.

Because of spreading Coronavirus (Covid-19) that has leaded to presenting thousands of online courses, many instructors and teachers are made to be more creative and produce interesting and creative lesson plans in order to attract the students who used to be present in traditional classrooms and those who have had never any experience of online courses surely have no image of such instruction. So, teachers are expected to change methods, materials or contents for online courses and make them more effective, comprehensible and dynamic, (Huang, Wu, & Chen, 2012), thanks to technological progresses that have helped education field a lot.

In general, for many students with no online courses background, it is necessary to produce more activities, tasks and exercises to make the matter more clarified for the online learners and give them the feeling that they are in a real and in-person classroom which make the teachers' responsibility more challenging and more difficult.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to convey the study the following questions were proposed to conduct the qualitative case study design:

Q1. What are the most important differences between monolinguals' and bilinguals' styles in online learning?

Q2. Is there any difference between the learning styles in traditional classrooms and online classrooms?

LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

One probable effective matter in learning through online classes for long distances among different countries is the time difference in-between that made difficult setting time for the class because while in one country, it is day the other is passing night. So, such considered case may occur during some inadequate hours; e.g. very early in the morning or late at night that the learners have less energy or they are bored enough to have class; this would be the same for the teacher to teach.

In this case, between Iran and Canada, there were 9.5 hours difference and between Iran and the USA, 12.5 hours. The teacher was open-handed to change the time of the class during Coronavirus period and wherever was closed around the world as quarantine, so the learners were free enough to set time for their Spanish class.

The similarities among English, Farsi and Spanish that mentioned in Literature section made the process of teaching easy for the teacher, while she knows all three languages.

Ethically, the researcher had no permission from her participants to name them and show their photos by WhatsApp or Skype page as an example in this study- as interview video call sessions and run classes- because the participants were subconsciously under study in order to achieve more natural reactions and significant results.

METHODOLOGY

A comparative case-study design was used in order to evaluate their learning through online classes. The researcher at first run a qualitative case study of both classes, each separately, and then compared the results and provided a comparative study.

Participants

Two Iranian adults were under this study: one monolingual 23 years old male, living in Canada and a bilingual 20 years old female, living in the USA. The participants had no idea they were under observation, in order to observe and evaluate their natural responses, reactions, styles and techniques, obeying all the ethical issues by the researcher.

Instruments

Interview (at the beginning of the course, before getting started the first session and during the course, to have their feedbacks and feelings about the process of the class) and diagnostic tests (or progress tests) during the course of instruction given by the teacher were used. The interviews conducted by the teacher from both participants included 7 questions and lasted for about 10 minutes, which were through WhatsApp video calls and note-taken by the teacher who was the researcher though. After the interviews and knowing that both were elementary students, there was no need to get any pretest because of lack of Spanish knowledge.

The teacher used portfolios and diagnostic tests to evaluate the improvement of the students' learning in all four skills (writing, reading, speaking and listening) and finally achievement test (regarding Uso and Prisma book-new editions- which were as the materials of the course) selected by the teacher from both books to assess a general Spanish knowledge based on the content of the course, which was e-mailed to the students, printed and answered by them and again sent back to the teacher to check as a photo via WhatsApp. (See appendices 1 & 2).

The conveyed interview by the teacher which was answered by the learners had following questions:

1- How do you like Spanish? (to know their interests)
2- Why do you want to learn Spanish? (To know their needs)
3- Is there any usage of Spanish language where you live? (to know their motivation)
4- To what extent do you know Spanish? (to know their Spanish knowledge)

5- Have you ever experienced any online course? (to know their online experiences)

6- What were the differences between traditional and online classes for you? (to know their feelings, imagination and learning styles about traditional and online classes)

7- How have you been learning something while face-to-face classes? (to know their learning styles in in-person classes)

Data Collection

Data was collected through an oral-visual interview as a 10 minutes video call via WhatsApp for each, and note taken by the researcher to analyze next.

The researcher took notes while interview, wrote the answers and based on questions and answers made a brief table as following to have an overall map about two students in order to make an adequate syllabus for each. (See table 1).

Table 1. the interview results in brief

	interests	needs	motivation	Spanish knowledge	Online course experiences	Differences between online and in-person classes	Learning styles in traditional classes
Female bilingual	yes	2nd language in the USA	A lot	Just some basic words	no	Not having any image	Logical, Visual, kinesthetic and social
Male monolingual	So much	Travelling	enough	Not too much	yes	They are the same just physically far from teacher and classmate	Logical, verbal, and kinesthetic

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Data Analysis

The interview answers of both participants were analyzed by the researcher. She wrote the brief answers in a table and considered several factors like: their needs, cultural backgrounds, their L1, duration of each session (1 hour), duration of the whole term (7 months) and their learning styles to design a suitable syllabus for each student regarding the gained data.

PROCEDURE

In order to answer the research questions, the teacher conducted the study while three principal phases:

Phase 1- Interview

It is important for any teacher to know about the background language knowledge of the students, their needs, interests and motivation to learn a new language, whether in face-to-face classes or online classes; so, at first and before getting started the course, the teacher interviewed both monolingual and bilingual students in a narrative form, via video calls through WhatsApp application to know their needs, backgrounds, language knowledge, level and experiences and to get some points about their learning styles, shown in the above table.

Based on the responses of the learners, regarding their needs, styles and interests, the teacher set the whole program, syllabus design and lesson plan for each single session. Both learners had no experience in learning Spanish except knowing some words like: hola (hello), ad*iós* (goodbye) and some basic words learned by applications like Duolingo; so generally they were in the elementary level.

Because of having no or little experience of passing any online course, the teacher set 1 hour classroom- which is considered as standard for online courses, because no more than 1.5 hours is recommended (Ferriman, 2015)- per session in order to prevent students getting tired and remain fresh. Although there are several opinions about the duration of the online courses, some say between 15 to 30 minutes and others believe that it shouldn't be more than 1.5 hours (Winstead).

Phase 2- Teaching Process

After determining the level of the students, the teacher designed the syllabus and followed her lesson plan for each session according to their needs, feelings, backgrounds, motivation, styles and other factors. Based on the results of the interviews the researcher pointed only one or two differences in using learning styles by the learners in face-to-face classes and online classes, although generally all are the same, which made the teacher to be aware of that and set her syllabus regarding their changed styles. E.g. the monolingual male used to learn English in in-person classes by verbal (linguistic) and physical (kinesthetic) style and bilingual female used to learn through social (interpersonal), and visual (spatial) style- using board and TV- at school that were not possible though online classes-both used to use physical (kinesthetic) and logical (mathematical) style and compare and contrast everything in Spanish such as vocabularies or grammar to their L1- whether Farsi or English -; so the teacher tried to assimilate the online class more similar to those in-person classes for them; e.g. instead of giving pair work (social style) because of lack of classmate, she, herself, tried to plays a role as a classmate and work with her student-while the class was private online classroom- or instead of using smart boards, she used a small white board, writing on it and showing to the student. One of the most important strategies or techniques used by the learners was using L1 (English and Farsi by the bilingual student and Farsi by the monolingual student) while learning Spanish, that was the concern in this study; e.g. the monolingual male used Farsi to ask a question or ask the meaning of a word, and the bilingual female did so, she used to ask in English and sometimes in Farsi. So the teacher tried to assimilate and facilitate the process of learning for them using their preferences based on their styles; like using their L1 (Farsi for the monolingual male and English/ Farsi for bilingual female to help them learn more). Each lesson plan followed four skills: writing, reading, listening and speaking, all by different tasks, and based on the styles of the students; e.g. the monolingual male preferred to write down every sentence and make an example for each which was more similar to self-experiencing and kinesthetic style; while the bilingual female used to look at the board (visual), listen to the teacher and actually the audios of the book played by the teacher (aural)

and comparing every word or structure with L1 (logical style). By all this, the teacher managed the class regarding their styles using their L1 to ask or answer their questions- but not whole the class- just to make some clarifications, using a small white board, writing on it and showing to the learner, playing audios and tracks of the book by computer, and giving them activities to do during the class time like writing two sentences or making an example by a new word, giving them writing, exercises-extracted from the mentioned books (material of the class) or internet- and tasks to do as homework sent through WhatsApp (see appendices 3 & 4) as they did it, they sent it back to the teacher to check. So the teacher made a portfolio for both to see their evaluation in grammar and writing and evaluate their progress in speaking, reading and listening by diagnostic tests that were orally conveyed each session. So, both were learning little by little and subconsciously how to change their preferences and learning styles and how to adapt themselves to online courses.

The teacher used sequential oral diagnostic or progress tests during the classes to evaluate the learning process of students through speaking, using truly the words, sentences and grammatical structures.

<u>Note</u>: The teacher at first tried to speak and clarify the matters, in online classes or through WhatsApp texts, in L1 for the learners (Farsi for monolingual male and English and Farsi for bilingual female) and saying some basic words like greeting in Spanish; but little by little as the students learned more Spanish, she tried to change the language of the classroom from L1 to L2 (target language, Spanish) even by sending messages or tasks in WhatsApp. (See appendix 5 & 6) because for the interview or confirmation the time of the online classes they had no Spanish knowledge to talk or text in Spanish, but later by passing session by session they got more information and enhanced their Spanish so that they could make short sentences and ask or answer in Spanish, even though they still used their L1 (when they wanted to ask or say something long or complicated that they didn't know how to express it in Spanish). (See appendix 7 & 8)

Phase 3- Achievement test

Both monolingual and bilingual learners were given an achievement test after four months of learning Spanish which was extracted from "Uso" and

the "Prisma" book that covered four skills. They had 20 minutes to fill in the blanks related to vocabulary, grammar and word order. They had 12 minutes to read a text and answer the questions and 12 minutes to write a (30 words) text. The teacher played two auditions and they answered the corresponding questions and finally there was a topic to discuss to assess their speaking in 3 minutes. The questioned selected from the books by the teacher; both books have questions as tests.

Note: The point is that, this achievement test was conveyed just only to have a wrap up of the course after four months (something like a posttest) and there was no obligatory need to do that because the teacher had got the proficiency and learning styles of the students sufficiently during the course of instruction by those diagnostic (progress) tests which revealed that both learners -whether using Farsi or English as L1- were able to make short simple sentences grammatically true but they were not able to say and answer the teacher rapidly; they needed to think and analyze the questions in Spanish by using logical style and then they could respond. A sample of the achievement tests is seeable in appendices 1 and 2, as mentioned earlier, answered by the learners and sent back to the teacher via WhatsApp to check.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In order to answer the research questions and to make a comparison between the participants of the study, in this regard, the diagnostic tests conducted by the teacher during the course of instruction and the results of the achievement tests represented that both monolingual male and bilingual female had the same achievement and language knowledge in Spanish, in four skills, considering that both were at the same age range. Both used their L1 (Farsi and English-Farsi), used some different and some common learning styles but at the end, they showed the same proficiency. It is represented that whether using Farsi or English-Farsi as L1 of the learners, they will have about the same range of Spanish knowledge after four months of learning Spanish; whether they use visual, social, logical or any other kind of learning style they would have the same proficiency level of learning Spanish language.

By all above, the researcher found that there is no difference between the learning styles used by the learners in traditional classes and online classes; i.e. the learners prefer to use the same techniques and styles in face-to-face classes and in online classes; the matter is that it would be impossible to use some of these learning styles during online courses (like social style, if it is a private class and there is no classmate), so this would be the teacher's duty to simulate online classes to those in-persons by changing strategies, tools, materials and maybe the method so that the learning process would be easier for the students; i.e. if the teacher is familiar with the learning styles of the students and some of them are impossible to run through the online classroom, s/he can change the teaching strategies and substitute other techniques to make the online class more similar to the traditional one and more tangible for the learners. E.g. if there is no classmate and the class is a private one, and the learner is eager to social learning style, the teacher, as this study, can play a classmate's role and work in pair with the learner.

DISCUSSION

The teacher's role in online classes and his/her teaching strategies is a recommended study for the future researches. Although the researcher observed strategies used by the learners in this study as well, she suggests focusing on the learning strategies during online classrooms which were not the concern in this paper; such strategies were considered as intervening in actual research and were not the aim of the researcher in this topic.

It is also highly recommended to conduct a study about the psychology of online teaching and learning during Coronavirus (Covid-19) period in different societies and countries regarding the different backgrounds and cultures which are basic issues in second and foreign language learning. Based on this, researchers, teachers and any other stakeholders in this area are recommended to have more focus on different aspects of learners like age, ethnicity, culture, background knowledge and various learning styles; each can be provided in separate study- whether qualitative, quantitative or mixed method approach using any design- in order to have more concentration on online teaching and learning.

While this study was a comparative case study between 2 adults Spanish students showing the above results, it would be more fruitful to have deep researches among more learners and greater populations to get more information about the quality of learning through online education.

As mentioned earlier about the similarities between languages- here, Farsi, Spanish and English- another important suggested topic would be more concentration on other languages and dialects, with different accents and/or dictations, with different roots, bases and cultures; such as: African languages, Japanese, Russian, Greek, Hebrew, etc.

CONCLUSION

By answering the research questions and the findings of the study, it is comprehended that both monolingual and bilingual, whether male or female, with the same age range and language level and from two near countries like America and Canada- but the Iranian nationality and Iranian culture- can have the equal Spanish proficiency; both used different L1 (Farsi and English), some different and some common learning styles but at the end, it showed the same range of achievement in Spanish Language.

It is also concluded through the evaluation of both classes that monolingual and bilingual learners use many learning styles by using their L1 in the online classes and also WhatsApp messages, surprisingly there is no difference in results; both learned Spanish with the same level, showed the results of the diagnostic and achievement tests. The researcher concluded that whether the learner use Farsi or English/Farsi they learn Spanish alike, with same achievement and knowledge which is revealed by the results of the both kinds of tests. So their progress and evaluation in learning Spanish were equal in four skills. Whether using English or Farsi the Spanish learner after four months of education would have a specific knowledge of the target language.

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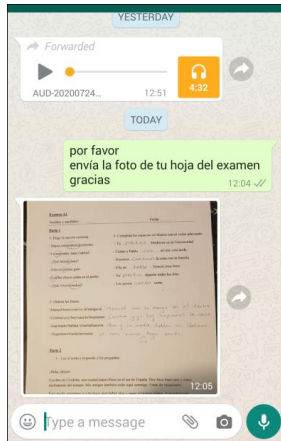
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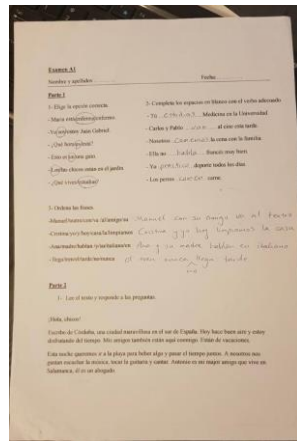
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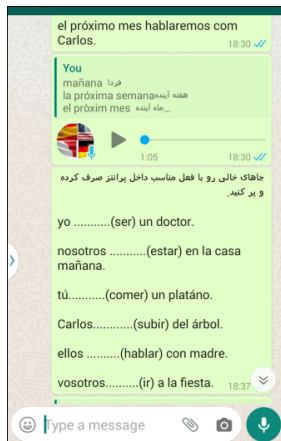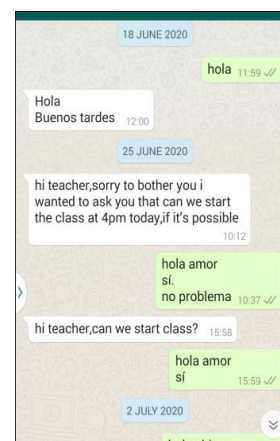
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APPENDICES

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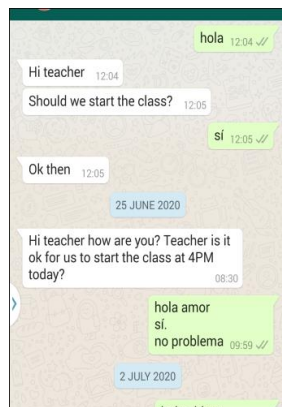

Appendix 2

Appendix 3

Appendix 4

Appendix 5

Appendix 6

Appendix 7

Appendix 8