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Native Speaker Criteria in CPH Research: Why Does It Matter?

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Abstract

This paper overviews the native speaker criterion used as a yard stick in language acquisition especially in the context of Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) research. First, it identifies the contradiction that the criterion has been used extensively even though the validity of the criterion has been acknowledged to be infirm. Second, it refers the logic that is used to explain the difference between the L2 ultimate attainment and L1: the L2 speaker has multicompetence and the L1 speaker exhibits monocompetence. Third, three practical problems related to the use of the criterion are focused upon: definition of the native speaker, validity in testing, and switching from L2 to L1. Finally, an alternative criterion is discussed.

臨界期仮説の研究において、ネイティブスピーカーが第2言語話者の言語能力の判定基準として使われてきた。研究者の多くは、その基準を使用することに問題があると指摘しているにもかかわらず、未だにその傾向は大きく変わることがない。本稿では、その矛盾に関して次の4点を中心に考察する。1) 臨界期仮説の研究におけるネイティブスピーカーの基準使用についての背景。2) ネイティブスピーカーと第二言語話者の言語能力の違い。3) 基準使用に関する問題点。4) 新たな基準の可能性。

Introduction

In the context of language acquisition, the history of CPH started with Penfield (1959). He stated that a biological clock is attached in the child's brain and that allows him/her to have a specialized capacity to learn language through natural exposure. The age of nine was set as a time limit for cerebral flexibility that enables children to acquire language through direct input. After nine years of age, language is learned analytically and then achieving a native like proficiency would be more difficult. Lenneberg (1967) developed the idea, based on a biological and neurological explanation, by hypothesizing the lateralization of a hemisphere is a trigger to the critical period for language acquisition and suggested that it begins about the age of 2 and ends at puberty.

Since the late 1960's, after Penfield (1959) and Lenneberg (1967) had presented the notion of Critical Period (CP) to the field of language acquisition, this issue has been extensively debated and it is still not proven whether CP exists or not. Some researchers are opposed to the existence of CP (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1999; Birdsong, 1992, 2006, 2007; Birdsong & Molis, 2001; Bongaerts, 1999, 2003; Bongaerts, Mennen, & Van Der Slik, 2000; Bongaerts, van Summeren, Planken, & Schils, 1997; Colantoni, & Steele, 2006; Felix, 1985; Marinova-Todd, 2003; Marinova-Todd, Marshall, & Snow, 2000; Montrul & Slabakova, 2003; Van Boxtel, Bongaerts, & Coppen, 2005; White & Genesee, 1996), others

are in favour of it (Coppieters, 1987; DeKeyser, 2000; Hyltenstam, 1988; Hyltenstam, & Abrahamsson, 2000, 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Johnson, & Newport, 1989; Long, 1990, 2005, 2007; Patkowski, 1980; Scovel, 1988, 2000, 2006), and there are also researchers who admit that there are extremely talented language learners who pass the native speaker level in some linguistic areas although the number is very limited (Ioup, 1995; Ioup, Boustagui, Tigi, & Moselle, 1994; Moyer, 1999).

As many researchers prefer the term sensitive period instead of CP, this phenomenon could neither have an all or nothing effect, nor cause abrupt onset-offset because language acquisition could also occur outside this period (Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2001). This characteristic is probably one of the factors that could make this research more complicated. Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2003a) summarize the past empirical findings as follows:

While few researchers today would deny long-term advantages for child starters, especially after reviews have found no counter evidence to this, on child starters (Krashen, S., Long, M. H., and Scarcella, R. (1979); Long, M. H. (1990); Singleton, D. (1989; 2001) views differ as to whether these observations should be explained by biological scheduling, that is, by constraints imposed on the learner along with maturation, or by social/psychological factors. (pp. 539-540)

There is little consensus on CPH studies besides the above example inspite of decades of research quests and the controversy seems to never end. Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2003a) consider that this endless discussion is caused by the notion of *the native speaker*. They assert that empirical data in the field lacks validity and could jeopardize the foundation of the CPH research because there is no explicit criterion as to what is meant by native speaker proficiency.

Birdsong (2006, 2009) points out that in the literature the native speaker has been referred as the monolingual in the CPH research context and has been used interchangeably as a benchmark, and sometimes incorrectly, with the term L2 ultimate attainment. Moreover, the criterion seems to vary from the sample of the native speakers' performance to their intuitive competence which is then compared qualitatively or quantitatively with those of L2 speakers'.

There is a major contradiction here; researchers have been using the native speaker as a criterion in CPH research and at the same time criticizing its validity. Many researchers claim that this criterion should be reconsidered (cf. Bley-Vroman, 1989; Cook, V., 1992, 1999; Davies, A., 2003, 2004; Kecskes & Papp, 2000; Long, 1990; Munoz, 2011; Pavlenko, 1999; Piller, 2002; Schachter, 1990). This paper reexamines the concept the native speaker as a yard stick in the contradiction. First, it focuses on differences between L1 and L2 ultimate attainment. Second, it refers to the factors that could be involved in the cause of the differences. Third, it reflects problems when the native speaker criteria are actually used in a research design. In conclusion, a discussion and suggestion for future research are made from the perspectives of validity and practicality.

Is L2 ultimate attainment the same as L1?

The literature confirms that the native speaker norm should be reconsidered (Bley-Vroman, 1989; Cook, 1992, 1999; Davies, 2003, 2004; Kecskes & Papp, 2000; Long, 1990; Pavlenko, 1999; Piller, 2002;

Munoz, 2011; Schachter, 1990). What implies is that there is no explicit criterion for native speaker proficiency, and there will be no point in discussing whether the L2 learner could reach the native level of language proficiency or not. To proceed with a discussion without having a logical reasoning problem, this paper considers that the native speaker criterion has been valid and properly used in research within a margin of error.

The most popular logic that has been used to criticize the deficiency of the native speaker norm is based on the assumption that L2 ultimate attainment is not the same as L1. Some studies acknowledge that young L2 learners could become quite fluent speakers with possibly a non-native accent (e.g., Flege, 1999, 2002; Flege, Frieda, & Nozawa, 1997; Guion, Flege, & Loftin, 2000; Piske, Mackay, & Flege, 2001) and others maintain that their L2 ultimate attainment is different from the L1 (Birdsong, 2009; DeKeyser, 2000; Flege, 1999; Hyldenstam, 1992; Hyldenstam & Abrahamsson, 2000, 2003b; Sorace, 1993, 2003). Some studies assert that the proficiency of very young starters and high proficient bilinguals would be no different from that of the native speakers (Flege, 1995; Mack, 1989; Montrul, 2002, 2011a; Pallier, Bosch, & Sebastián-Gallé's, 1997; Wong Fillmore, 1991).

For example, Flege (1995) has detected the presence of a foreign accent in the sound of /i/, /ε/, and /a/ between early bilinguals of Italian and L1 monolingual English speakers, and he concluded that the difference results from the degree of perceived similarities between the two languages. Furthermore, Mack (1989) investigated French bilinguals and L1 English speakers' ability to identify and discriminate the synthetic English sounds of /i/ and /ɪ/. Results were that they could discriminate the difference between the vowels but there was difference in the location of phoneme boundaries and he reached the conclusion that their perception of the vowels is very similar with that of the L1 speakers' but not the same. In a similar research framework to Mack's study, Pallier, Bosch, and Sebastián-Gallé's (1997) studied bilingual speakers of Catalan and Spanish compared with L1 Spanish speakers. They assessed the identification and discrimination of the synthetic Spanish sound of /e/ and /ε/ by those speakers and concluded that the influence of L1 is so persistent, even if exposure to L2 language was begun at an early age, that the malleability to a new phonetic system is considered to be severely limited.

In bilingual studies there are also similar results reported. Wong Fillmore (1991) conducted a nationwide study on bilingual children in the U.S.A. to find out how timing and social factors affect the retention and continued use of their primary languages and the development of their second language when they settled in a new English speaking environment. He concluded as follows:

Social and psychological factors have been implicated in the case of adult language learners, whereas situational factors have been critical in the case of children. Fossilized interlanguages are very likely to develop in the language-learning situations that we find in many schools with large enrollments of immigrant and refugee students. In the classrooms of such schools, non-English speakers frequently outnumber English speakers. In fact, except for their teachers, the learners may have little contact with people who know the language well enough to help them learn it. In any event, the language learners spend a lot more time talking with one another than they do with their teachers, and the English they hear most often is the imperfect varieties spoken by classmates rather than the more standard varieties spoken by their teachers. That

being the case, the input they base their language learning on being the speech of learners like themselves, is not altogether representative of the target language. Not surprisingly, language learning based on such input is neither perfect nor complete. (p. 345)

Results of the research support the claim made by Hyltenstam (1992, 1988) suggesting that “an early Age of Onset (AO) may be a necessary although not sufficient requirement for nativelike ultimate attainment” (p. 364).

Furthermore, Montrul (2002) examined the effect on ultimate attainment in Spanish by age of onset of English and Spanish bilingual speakers. The existence of incomplete acquisition and attrition of tense/aspect morphology in Spanish were recognized. Tests consisted of an oral production, a written completion and two meaning-interpretation tasks. Results showed that there was a significant statistical difference between both of the simultaneous bilingual and the early child L2 groups and L1 Spanish speakers, and explained that “morpho-phonological spell-outs and semantic features of functional categories are affected by incomplete acquisition and language loss” (p. 39). She concluded that “the earlier the age of onset of bilingualism and the more intense the exposure to the sociolinguistically dominant language, the more incomplete the adult grammar may turn out to be, suggesting that an early age of onset of a critical period might be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for convergent language acquisition” (p. 61).

In other perspectives, Ekberg (1998) investigated frequency differences in the use of specific structures and vocabulary between the L1 Swedish speaker and the L2 early learner. Results showed that significant difference was identified in sentence connectors, presentation, pseudo-coordination expressing progressive aspects, and complex predicates. In a similar study, McDonald (2000) investigated the grammatical proficiency of native English speakers and early L2 speakers of Vietnamese and Spanish. Results showed that there was no statistical difference in a grammatical judgment test between the Spanish native speakers and the English native speakers in contrast to the Vietnamese speakers whose English was judged not to be identical with the native English speakers'. The Vietnamese speakers had problems with such structures as articles and plurals that are markedly different from English. It was concluded that the result could more likely be attributed to their L1 than the amount and quality of input because those early Vietnamese speakers had been exposed to a massive English input at schools where English was spoken since the age of 5 (cf. Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2001; Butler, 2000).

There seem to be cases where even young starters have some difficulty passing the native speaker level, not only in one specific area but also in several areas. Most of the researchers consider L1 attrition and the amount and quality of input play a key role for ultimate acquisition and L2 ultimate attainment is not an automatic phenomenal outcome (Harley & Wang, 1997). Other than a biological factor, there could also be influential social and psychological factors involved in the process of second language acquisition. In the next section, the logic of why L2 ultimate attainment is different from L1 is discussed.

What is the cause of the difference?

As described in the previous section, the majority of researchers agree that L2 ultimate attainment fundamentally differs from L1. The logic behind the formulation is that the difference is caused by the multicompetence of the L2 speaker. The concept of multicompetence was introduced by Cook (1991) and it originates from Universal Grammar (UG) theory (Cook, 1992; Cook & Newson, 2007).

Cook, V. (1991) introduced the concept of multicompetence “the compound state of a mind with grammars” (p. 112) and distinguished the monocompetence of L1 “the state of the mind with only one grammar (ibid). Researchers such as Piller (2002), Kecskes and Papp (2000), and Pavlenko (1999) have the same standpoint that they are fundamentally different so that two different kinds of competences would not produce the same performance. According to Cook (1999), the proficiency of the L2 speaker is viewed as different rather than deficient. He explains that “multicompetence covers the total language knowledge of a person who knows more than one language, including both L1 competence and the L2 interlanguage (p. 190), and also suggests that multicompetence does not mean two monocompetences exist in one mind (Cook, 1992). Grosjean (1989) describe a prevalent view on bilingualism as follows:

A strong version of the monolingual (or fractional) view of bilingualism is that the bilingual has (or should have) two separate and isolable language competencies; these competencies are (or should be) similar to those of the two corresponding monolinguals; therefore, the bilingual is (or should be) two monolinguals in one person. (p. 4)

Grosjean (1989) claims that this belief unfortunately spread among many researchers and educators in the language science and that the monolingual speaker has always been used as a benchmark.

The notion of mono vs. multicompetence branched from UG theory (Cook & Newson, 2007). UG theory emphasizes that the accessibility to a parameter is considered to be a key to acquire language: natural acquisition is possible as long as the parameter is active. These remarks indicate that there is a critical time limit for both the L1 and L2 speaker to access the parameter. As far as L2 acquisition is concerned, Age of Acquisition (AOA) is considered as an important factor to make a fundamental difference between the early and late L2 learner’s performances.

Unfortunately, there are very few direct formulations to explain the difference between L2 ultimate attainment and L1 except the notion of mono vs. multicompetence. Although UG theory is deeply concerned with multicompetence, neither accounting for the development of UG in relation to multicompetence is the keystone of this paper nor is there sufficient room in this article so that we will move to focus on problems when the native speaker criteria are used in research.

What kind of problems does the native speaker criteria have?

The concept of the native speaker has been indispensable in the field of linguistics and its

fundamental importance is unlikely to change. The difficulty in the use of the concept remains in its illusory definition. The definition of the native speaker and its implications vary according to different disciplines (Coulmas, 1981). Rafter-Engel (1981) describes how this ideal mythical creature has been used as follows:

Anthropological linguists were aware of the fact that speech communities are not homogeneous but did not worry about increasing their subject population for statistical purposes. They simply layered their data according to one average old informant, one average middle aged informant, and one average young informant.

The sociolinguists divided native speakers by social class and even realized that each social class had more than one speaker. Eventually the native speaker was also endowed with a cultural background which manifested itself in the ethnography of speaking.

The average native speaker was always male. The average woman entered the subject pool only recently. She is generally still so average that be she young and middle class or old and lower class she can be compared to any type of average man. She is also so average that her verbal behavior can be examined without regard to the social situation in which it takes place. (p. 300)

Kravchenko (2010), Coulmas (1981) and Singh (1998, 2006) argue that a native speaker criterion has a number of methodological problems and has been used as a norm for a practical reason even though researchers acknowledge the problems. Some of the researchers such as Long (1993) contend that the native speaker norm should be reconsidered because it could increase a margin of error, influence validity and reliability and as a result it could provide a different interpretation.

In the field of CP research, there are three problems when the native speaker criteria are used. First of all, as with the other disciplines of linguistics, the definition of the native speaker and her/his language are a significant problem (Bachman, 1990; Davies, 1988; Lantolf & Frawley, 1985; Paikeday, 1985). Love (2010) describes the problem as follows:

Languages are not natural objects, and they do not become natural objects by theoretical fiat. There has never been agreement as to what a language is or even how we might set about deciding what a language is. What counts as a language is a matter of cultural and political context and purposes, and these can vary without limit. As every undergraduate introduction to linguistics points out, there is no justification for distinguishing, say, Swedish and Danish as separate languages while treating Mandarin and Cantonese as variants of the same language. There is no consensus as to where one language ends and another begins, either in time or in space or in terms of social differentiation. (p.592)

Love (2010) also refers to a real situation representing the difficulty of using the term native language in the Indian government census by quoting Pattanayak (1981). In the census the native language was defined as 1) “the language spoken by the individual from the cradle”, 2) “parent tongue”, and 3) “language ordinarily spoken in the household” (pp. 47-48). Even if the targeted

native speaker would be secured for experiments, careful attention still should be paid to the usage. Mufwene (1998) explains the difficulty of collecting reliable language data from the native speaker subject as follows:

Consequently, for the purposes of collecting reliable data on particular languages, and insofar as indigenized varieties are recognized as valid for linguistic investigation, having informants who are proficient in a variety seems far more relevant than having native speakers. In some communities, being an adult native speaker of one language variety also amounts to being proficient in it; however, in some others this equation does not hold. (p. 121)

As Mufwene (1988) observes, a community could be more complex than it looks. It has to preserve geographical, economic, political, social, educational, cultural, ethnographical, and historical variables inside and those variables are intricately woven. It is more difficult now to find a community in which a target native language is used and is still eligible to represent a reliable source of information as a language norm because the world is more mobile than ever.

Secondly, switching from L2 to L1 is a problem to identify the native speaker. Technically speaking, it would be very difficult to distinguish young L2 learners who claim their L2 is a dominant language from those who claim their L2 is still the second language although their proficiency is exactly as the same as the native speaker's. Should the former be called the native speaker or the bilingual?

There are many claims in the literature that L2 could be replaced by L1 if conditions are met and the processed L2 should be regarded not as L2 but a continuation of L1 acquisition (Bialystok 1997; Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994; Harley, & Wang, 1997). Kouritzin (1999) reports the case of Lara who was an immigrant from Finland and had moved to Canada when she was two years old. She lived with her family in a Finnish community until at the age of six when the family moved to a large city to more integrate with the main stream Canadian culture where English is used most of the time. By the age of 18, she considered that her Finnish was replaced by English and English became L1. Jia and Aaronson (2003) urge that switching from L2 to L1 among young immigrants more likely occurs if AOA is before ten and the first language tends to be maintained after that age. They concluded that this was caused by lack of or no support from the community the young immigrants belong to, or their parents' educational policy was to encourage them to integrate with the main stream culture in a host country. Flege (1999) also asserts that a frequent tradeoff among immigrant children is recognized especially in the phonetic-phonological domain. According to his claim, young immigrants could master L2 without a foreign accent at the expense of L1 loss, as L1 and L2 phonetic-phonological systems unavoidably interact with each other in the process of acquisition. The evidence of the incomplete acquisition of L1 and mutual interaction are observed in many cases of heritage speakers whose proficiency varies from the state of complete loss to the native level (cf. Montrul, 2011b, 2010a; Montrul & Ionin, 2010b).

Finally, in the area of testing, quite a few researchers are against the use of the native speaker criteria (Alderson, 1980; Carroll, 1971, 1983; Davies, 1988, 2003; Jafarpur, 1996; Johnson, 1981; Long, 1993; Marinova Todd, Marshall, & Snow, 2000). For example, Long (1993) states that the research

instruments used in most of the CPH studies are not precise enough to measure language proficiency accurately. Davies (1988) refers five unreliable variables in measuring language proficiency: “the native speaker, cut-off, the criterion score, the test and the language” (p. 32). The native speaker criterion is problematic; however, there are other factors that are associated with the problem.

First of all, Mrinova-Todd (2000) points out that the native speaker has accents and they could necessarily be perceived as the standard and criticizes that most of the studies designed to investigate L2 pronunciation failed to specify “either the exact margins of what is considered a standard accent in the target language or the degree of variability among native speakers” (p. 19). Furthermore, she stated that the background information, perception of L2 subjects, and a judge’s belief and experience in language acquisition could influence their decisions. Consequently, a native speaker could be judged as a non-native speaker in some area in the host country and vice-versa (cf. Long, 1993).

Second, some researchers argue that there is a variation in the native speaker’s proficiency (Bachman, 1990; Davies, 1988; Oiler & Spolsky, 1979; Paikeday, 1985; Stump, 1978). Davies (2003) claims that the native speaker’s proficiency is also developmental suggesting that “however close the match between our modeling of proficiency and the native speaker may be, we can never be sure that there is a complete match” (p. 173). Furthermore, interesting data on native speaker proficiency provided by Bachman (1990) suggests that “there is growing evidence that native speakers perform neither uniformly well on tests of all aspects of language ability, nor uniformly better than do non-natives” (pp. 248-249).

Third, a scoring method could play an important role on the effect of test performance (Bachman, 1990). For instance, Crewe (1977) examined Singapore English quoted by Goh Poh Seng’s novel *If We Dream Too Long* (1971) and commented that it could be very difficult to classify errors that were made by the non native speaker because the native speaker makes the same type of errors as well. This is a rather complicated case, however, unless a specific scoring guideline is provided and executed correctly as it is designed, validity would be absent in a test.

Lastly, selecting an irrelevant test has many implications to the native speaker criterion. It would be impossible to describe all the details of the native speaker’s language proficiency and to measure a particular one designed by a researcher because there are many complicatedly compounded factors that affect performance in tests (Jafarpur, 1996). Although it is acknowledged that the native speaker criterion has good face validity (Lado, 1978) and usefulness (Bachman, 1990), the validity of a test should be carefully examined as to whether the target language proficiency that the test is designed to measure corresponds with the objective of a tester. Jafarpur (1996) points out that “scores on tests are not so much affected by the specific trait the tests intend to tap as influenced by the strategic competence of the testees”(p. 83).

For example, Alderson (1980) examined the native and non-native speaker’s performance on the cloze tests in which different variables are set up according to the purpose of each experiment. Results showed that the native speaker’s performance was slightly better than the non-native speaker’s. However, either the former failed to reach a perfect score or there was no clear distinction between them. It was concluded that:

attempts to use native speakers as criteria for non-native speakers, as in clozentropy or much criterion-referenced testing, are misguided. If native speakers vary in their ability to do cloze tests, then the value of using them as criteria is doubtful". (p. 75)

He considers that the cause of variance results from intelligence: intelligence is closely related to language proficiency (cf. Oller, 1978) and that normal distribution of intelligence naturally occurs in the native speaker's population and thus the native speaker's language proficiency also varies.

Four basic problems have been focused on when the native speaker criterion was used in a practical situation. More problems would be probably identified if details are cited. Now, the time is for a final question: Should the native speaker criterion be abandoned or not? In the next section, the question is discussed as the conclusion of this paper.

Discussion

The contradiction of the native speaker criterion is two holds: most CPH researchers use the criterion but at the same time they claim that it should be reconsidered because it does not have firm validity (Alderson, 1980; Carroll, 1971, 1983; Davies, 1988, 2003; Jafarpur, 1996; Johnson, 1981; Long, 1993; Marinova Todd, Marshall, & Snow, 2000). The reason why the standard has been used in studies is its practicality (Bachman, 1990; Lado, 1987).

Researchers such as Birdsong (2009), Cook (1992), and Munoz (2011) suggest the bilingual speaker or the highly proficient early L2 speaker as an alternative choice. The basic logic of the proposal is that the L2 speaker has multicompetence and the L1 speaker has monocompetence and therefore, the standard should be the multicompetent L2 proficiency. However, this new criterion has at least two issues to be considered before it is put in practice.

One is the definition of the bilingual speaker. Grosjean (1989) describes the bilingual speaker as follows:

The "real" bilingual is seen as the person who is equally and fully fluent in two languages; he or she is the "ideal," the "true," the "balanced," the "perfect" bilingual (see Bloomfield, 1933; Thiery, 1978). All the others, who in fact represent the vast majority of people who use two languages in their everyday lives, are "not really" bilingual or are "special types" of bilinguals; hence the numerous qualifiers found in the literature: "dominant," "unbalanced," "semilingual," "alingual," etc. This search for the "true" bilingual has used traditional language tests as well as psycholinguistic tests which are constructed around the notion of "balance"; invariably the "ideal" bilinguals are the ones who do as well in one language as in the other. All others are somehow "less bilingual" and are put into an indeterminate category. (p. 4)

The problem of the bilingual speaker criterion is more complicated than the criterion of native speaker because proficiency varies much more in the case of the bilingual speaker. It is also important to know whether the bilingual speaker is "the person who is in the process of becoming bilingual", or "the one who has reached a stable level of bilingualism (Grosjean, 1989, p. 14). Defining

the stage at which the person is located and measuring their proficiency would be a very difficult task. Grosjean (1989) refers to tests that have been used for the bilingual speaker as follows:

The tests used with bilinguals are often quite simply the tests employed with the monolinguals of the two corresponding language groups. These tests rarely take into account the bilingual's DIFFERENTIAL NEEDS [sic] for the two languages or the DIFFERENT SOCIAL FUNCTIONS [sic] of these languages (what a language is used for, with whom, where, etc.; see Fishman, 1965). Many monolingual tests are quite inappropriate to evaluate the language skills of bilinguals; others need to be adapted substantially. (p. 4)

It would be challenging to write a test for the bilingual speaker because those needs and functions vary in individuals and they have more complicated educational, linguistically based, social backgrounds than the native speakers have, even in one community.

The other problem of the bilingual speaker criterion is the notion of switching: L2 becomes L1. This phenomenon has been empirically proved by many researchers (Bialystok, 1997; Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994; Flege, 1999; Harley & Wang, 1997; Kouritzin, 1999; Montrul, 2011b, 2010a; Montrul & Ionin, 2010b). Munoz (2011) contends as follows:

There is a sense, therefore, in which making a comparison between the proficiency of such language users in their dominant language and that of native speakers is not a matter comparing L2 attainment with an L1 baseline, because for such language users their dominant language for all practical purposes is ITSELF [sic] their L1. (p. 8)

Assuming this claim that the bilingual whose dominant language is the same in quality and proficiency as the native speaker's, would it be possible to say that using the bilingual speaker criterion would be the same as using the native speaker criterion. In other words, there are two types of L1 speakers: one is the monolingual native speaker and the other one is the bilingual speaker and their performance is identical.

In conclusion this paper suggests that it is not important whose L1 should be used as a criterion because once the monolingual native speaker learns a foreign language at school, technically they are no longer the monolingual native speaker but the multicompetent bilingual speaker. The world is already full of bilingual speakers (Grosjean, 1989). The line between the native speaker and the fluent bilingual speaker is very fuzzy. Davies (2003) describes that "the distinction native speaker-non-native speaker . . . is at bottom one of confidence and identity" (p. 213). What is more important is controlling variables between an experimental and control group. Long (1993) suggests, if the native speaker criterion is the only choice, that "Ns controls should be comparable in age, sex, education, and social class, and in any other way known to be sociolinguistically relevant in the language or dialect concerned" (p.125). Where the native speaker or the bilingual speaker is used as a criterion, describing participants in detail would be one key and controlling variables is the other.

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(2012年 7 月13日掲載決定)