



**Embracing Answerability in Dual Language Bilingual Education Research:
Toward a Vision of Anticolonial Solidarity**

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In the United States, bilingual education is not only a relatively young field of study, but it is also a very contested one. The popularity of dual language bilingual education (DLBE) programs is the reflection of a complex evolution of the field involving various ideological orientations and socio-political, cultural, and economic influences. As the field continues to evolve, it is essential to pause and reflect on its direction. This special issue paves the way for educational researchers in DLBE contexts to acknowledge and learn from past mistakes, address early limitations, and consider the current context to shape a transformative vision.

In this special issue, Dan Heiman leads us to embrace answerability as the path that can help us shape a more ethical future. The concept of answerability is fundamentally about an ethical responsibility in our interactions and relationships. Mikhail Bakhtin's (1986) notion of answerability in dialogism is rooted in the idea that every utterance or action within a dialogue or interaction carries ethical implications. Participants in a dialogue are answerable not only for their own words and actions but also for their impact on others. Answerability in dialogism is always contextual, considering the specific circumstances and historical context in which dialogue occurs. This situational aspect underscores the responsibility of participants to be aware of and responsive to the context of their interactions. Leigh Patel (2015) extended the idea of answerability to the field of educational research, arguing that researchers must be answerable not only for their findings but also for the broader implications and ethical dimensions of their work. This involves recognizing and addressing the historical and ongoing coloniality research can perpetuate and being mindful of how the researcher's positionality and the power dynamics at play influence their work.

The articles in this issue demonstrate that a path of answerability in DLBE will likely take us in different directions from the scholarly work that has traditionally dominated the field, asking us to rethink conventional notions of what counts as meaningful and ethical research in bilingual education. Embracing answerability compels us to interrogate and transform our approaches to inquiry and analysis and question our priorities, positionalities, and purposes in DLBE.

In this commentary, I contend that integrating the principle of answerability in research is essential for cultivating a vision of anticolonial solidarity in DLBE. I begin by providing a brief historical overview that illustrates how the field has historically been accountable to the wrong stakeholders, leading to its susceptibility to co-option and diminishing its transformative potential. I then explore the concept of answerability through the lens of Patel's (2015) decolonizing research framework and build on insights from this special issue as illustrations towards developing a path of

ethical accountability to the communities that bilingual education aims to serve. Finally, I conclude by asserting that embracing answerability, by centering a vision of anticolonial solidarity towards historically marginalized communities, can help reclaim the radical roots of bilingual education (Flores, 2016).

Historical Overview

While bilingualism and multilingualism have existed for centuries, the academic study of bilingual education as a distinct field began to emerge in the mid-20th century, driven by various social, political, and educational factors. The Civil Rights Movement demanded a transformation of an oppressive education system rooted in the colonial enterprise that marginalized racialized and language minoritized students. The struggles for civil rights, particularly from Chicana and Puerto Rican activists, established a race radical vision and gave way to the idea of bilingual education as a progressive practice (Donato, 1997; Flores, 2016; Trujillo, 2004). Bilingual education gradually grew as a distinct field of study, gaining momentum in the latter half of the 20th century within the broader field in various contexts: educational reforms; pressures to address the needs of multilingual learners; and growing interest in the role of bilingualism in cognitive, economic, academic, and sociocultural development.

Scholars and researchers began to conduct empirical studies and theoretical analyses focused specifically on bilingual education, exploring topics such as language acquisition, language policy, program design, and instructional practices. Yet in their genealogical exploration, Grinberg and Saavedra (2000) noted that by the early 21st century, the field of bilingual education had failed to achieve the desired transformation of the education system. Instead, they argued, efforts to legitimize bilingual/ESL education as an academic field, in the context of continuous opposition and the dominance of positivist research, shifted its focus away from cultural and political critique to primarily technocratic linguistic aspects and psycholinguistic approaches. Traditional academic research in virtually every field has given authority to researchers—not marginalized communities or participants—to set agendas, ask questions, and control data collection and representation (Vogel, 2022). This has perpetuated colonial logics and constructed hierarchies among language practices and among language users (García et al., 2021). Failing to interrogate the colonial logics of traditional academic research constrained the anticolonial discourse of bilingual education, disabling the field's ability to truly challenge the settler colonial (Patel, 2015) and White supremacist (Flores, 2019) foundations of the education system. As we look into the past, it is not difficult to recognize a failure to remain answerable to the very communities for whom the field was supposedly advocating. Instead, the field sought to answer to those already in power, particularly academia, aiming to get a place at the table that could validate its voice.

To be sure, this is not a critique to the foundational scholars in the field. The context of the time might not have given space for much more, and what scholars in bilingual education did was in many ways revolutionary and opened the door to new possibilities. It would be naive to think that any field of study within academia, a historically colonial institution, can seamlessly align with civil rights struggles and produce radical societal change in a few decades. But as a hegemonic institution of knowledge production and legitimization, it would also be inaccurate to believe that it has no power at all, for better or worse.

Current Developments in DLBE

Bilingual education as a field of study has continued to evolve, and today's scholars and practitioners draw on interdisciplinary perspectives that have expanded from linguistics and psychology to sociology, anthropology, education, the humanities, and beyond to address the complex challenges and opportunities associated with bilingualism and biliteracy in diverse educational contexts. This evolution, while more reflexive about power relations, has not necessarily represented a complete turn to become accountable to historically marginalized communities. Research is never an innocent endeavor (Smith, 2012); in many ways, scholarship continues to be significantly influenced by academic priorities that often diverge from community goals. Moreover, it partially mirrors existing social practices, which in turn reflect the historical, ideological, sociopolitical, economic, and cultural factors that shape these contexts. Therefore, taking a serious look in the mirror is essential if we are to ensure that the field moves forward toward more ethical and socially transformative goals.

Among many significant developments, two deem attention in relation to this special issue. First, two-way dual language immersion (TWI), or dual language bilingual education (DLBE), has emerged in the past decade as one of—if not the most—desirable models of bilingual education in the United States. When DLBE programs opened the door to English speakers as a way to become bilingual alongside designated English learners toward the end of the 20th century, there was a hope that bilingual education would cease to be attacked and that language minoritized students would escape the deficit frame in which they were cast by positioning them as possessors of respectable, valuable, and desirable resource: their language (Ruiz, 1984). Fast forward a few decades, and indeed DLBE has opened opportunities to offer bilingual education to language minoritized students in places where access to it would be impossible otherwise. However, the doors have also continued to be closed for large numbers of emergent bilinguals, and the attacks against bilingual education for minoritized speakers remain. Yet DLBE is now largely desired by many families from the dominant group. The prominence of dual language—and its contradictions—reveal a layered context in which both neoliberal/capitalist priorities and interest convergence intersect and collide with struggles for language rights, equity, and desegregation mandates (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017).

Second, a language of critique has indeed emerged in bilingual education scholarship in regard to the glorification of DLBE. These critiques and interrogations have highlighted the inequities that can not only permeate but also be reproduced by these programs under the delusion of dual language as an inherently progressive and emancipatory program (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017) and point to the necessity to establish critical consciousness as the foundation of all DLBE goals and practices (Heiman et al., 2024). Critical scholars in bilingual education have pointed to the gentrification of DLBE, which occurs when originally designed programs to support language minoritized students are co-opted by more affluent, predominantly English-speaking families which leads to displacement of the original beneficiaries, shifts in resource allocation and pedagogy, erodes cultural components, and exacerbates social and educational inequities (Valdez et al., 2016). Furthermore, the concept of raciolinguistic ideologies, developed by Flores and Rosa (2015), has helped unveil the racism and colonial mindsets that reinforce the “White listening subject” in DLBE, which occurs when individuals or institutions, consciously or unconsciously, perceive the speech and communication of racialized people as deficient or deviant, regardless of their actual performance. Through this lens, scholars have examined DLBE policies and practices that can continue to marginalize racialized learners as Whiteness is unconsciously established as the measure of success (i.e., Flores et al., 2020). Finally, the concept of translanguaging (García & Wei,

2015) has advanced anticolonial definitions of language and bilingualism by challenging traditional, colonial notions of languages as fixed, separate entities. By viewing language practices as dynamic, fluid, and integrated and reflecting how people naturally use their full linguistic repertoires in diverse contexts, translanguaging offers a framework to critically examine and transform traditional approaches to teaching and learning in bilingual settings and have helped scholars interrogate language separation, the dominance of standardized languages, definitions of bilingual proficiency, and deficit thinking in DLBE programs (García et al., 2024).

Despite these critical developments in the research of DLBE, research and practice continue to function in almost divergent directions even when focusing on the same contexts. Policy and practice appear to be more strongly influenced by sociocultural and economic factors than by cutting edge research, which is often inaccessible to the necessary stakeholders.

If the construction of language as a problem and the struggle for language as a civil and human right were the dominant orientations for language policy and planning since the colonial era and through the 20th century (Ruiz, 1984), in the last 20 years, it has been the notion of language not just as a resource as Ruiz envisioned it, but more so as a commodity (Cervantes-Soon, 2014) and thus as property, which has taken center stage in the policy and planning of DLBE. Given the pressures of capitalist approaches on education systems, which are especially evident in today's era of school choice, DLBE programs are often marketed as key amenities or selling points as schools compete for student enrollment (Dorner et al., 2021). In this way, DLBE can materialize settler colonial ideologies, in which constructing land, all living things, and knowledge (including bilingualism) as property is essential and in which individuals are situated differently based on their capacity to possess it (Patel, 2015). This creates an extremely complex context of intricate forces and human relations that defies dichotomized notions of oppressor and oppressed. For example, teachers may enact oppressive practices, may act against their own beliefs, and may often find themselves pressured by both legal mandates and competition strategies that restrict their own agency, autonomy, and humanity and that rank their skills on the basis of test scores or how well they can control their students. In such a context, a teacher may want to foster critical consciousness, tap into translanguaging pedagogies, or combat raciolinguistic ideologies, but the realities of the classroom may make these endeavors appear unattainable. Thus, critical research, rather than empowering or transformative, may become burdensome and can be perceived as not only extractive but also judgmental. It is in this context that a new orientation to research that can better support practice is necessary.

The Path of Answerability in DLBE Research

Along with ownership, answerability involves both speakers and listeners shouldering responsibilities, encompassing the stewardship of ideas and learning. Patel (2015) calls on educational researchers to keep three primary reference points in mind to deepen our comprehension of the social, political, and material landscapes of educational research: *learning, knowledge, and contexts*. In Patel's framework, *learning* is seen as a dynamic, transformative process of becoming. Research is part of this learning, involving a process of inquiry, reflection, and growth and bridging the known and the unknown. Secondly, *knowledge* is contextual, incomplete, perspectival, and provisional and subject to revision rather than being absolute or universal. Therefore, Patel calls on researchers to approach research as a means to facilitate and enhance learning, both for themselves and for the communities involved; to recognize the situated

nature of knowledge production with awareness of the limitations and biases inherent in their work and their positionality; and to humbly consider the scope and certainty of their findings.

In DLBE, being answerable to learning entails revising and correcting our assumptions and identifying gaps in our theories and frameworks. Although decades ago DLBE emerged as a beacon of hope about the promise of linguistic and racial integration to combat deficit thinking about language minoritized speakers, answerable research like the article by Cioè-Peña and Bullock demand we reconsider what we have thought to be empowering to recognize when it becomes a process of gatekeeping and exclusion in which the oppressed become the oppressor. This process of interrogation is also illustrated in Alvarado's research, reminding us that DLBE is embedded in normative colonial practices and ideologies that view families' knowledge as primitive and in need of intervention through schooling. This research reveals the dehumanizing practice of schooling in which only certain fragments of children's whole selves are accepted while simultaneously ascribing identities of underservability. At the same time, Chaparro's article illustrates that answerability to learning and knowledge involves not only interrogating but also listening closely, reflecting, and seeking to understand and incorporate multiple perspectives in order to revise our frameworks and identify ruptures of possibility and solidarity despite the persistence of unequal power relations. And as shown in Bhansari's contribution, the process of learning, both as a researcher and participant, are ongoing, involving constant growing pains and transformation—and not always with a definitive answer, solution, or final destination.

Thirdly, Patel's framework also emphasizes the importance of situating research within the sociocultural and political environments in which research takes place and to pay particular attention to the ongoing impacts of colonialism and other forms of oppression that shape the contexts of study. Hurie's study illustrates this process, unpacking the "benevolent" mask of extraction in venture philanthropy that claims to offer solutions for educational problems without considering communities' goals, and which ultimately undermines communities' collective efforts toward self-determination. Hurie's work implicitly compels us to look inward and reflect on whether our research does the same thing. Patel thus urges researchers to strive to conduct research that is relevant and responsive to the specific needs and realities of the communities involved, which entails deeply engaging with the lived experiences and knowledge systems of those being researched. All of the articles in this special issue demonstrate this practice of deep engagement. Alvarado's, Henderson's, and Bhansari's articles, in particular, shed light on the vulnerability experienced by research participants as they share raw expressions of emotion: sadness, fragmentation, frustration, self-doubt, confusion, exhaustion, feelings of inadequacy, and worry. These articles reveal the knowledge production generated through the embodiment of feelings, emotions, and vulnerability. Moreover, the researchers' responses are those of witnesses, of *acompañamientos* (Heiman & Nuñez-Janes, 2021), and of solidarity, which involves further responsibility to action. This action may involve the researcher's further reflection of their own positionality and privilege, realigning research priorities to match contexts' needs or disrupting the status quo of school practices during fieldwork.

Toward Anticolonial Solidarity

Answerability in research is fundamentally anticolonial and rooted in dialectical practices. Turning to answerability as a form of ethical accountability and commitment toward historically marginalized communities in our contexts of research offers an alternative pathway from the hegemonic direction in which bilingual education as a field of study took at its inception. It can

help establish a vision of anticolonial solidarity in DLBE by emphasizing the relational aspect of research and our responsibility to collective praxis which goes counter to approaches based on individualism and competition (Freire, 2014). The articles in this issue clearly reveal the centering of this relationality in ways that make explicit researchers' intersectional positionalities, privileges, and limitations. These articles prioritize people, their experiences, struggles, embodied learning, and efforts toward self-determination in the production of knowledge rather than centering academic or linguistic outcomes or reifying categories, language allocation policies, or arbitrary measures of success imposed by school systems. In this way, we are able to recognize imperatives in the field that can often be masked by detached and "objective" research endeavors. For example, Henderson's and Bhansari's articles make clear that racialized teachers are exhausted and that addressing the extractive and unsupportive conditions of their jobs is an urgent matter. Henderson's and Cioè-Peña and Bullock's research also bring to the surface the fact that neurodiverse students have been ignored and marginalized in DLBE research for way too long. Situating people's liberation and humanization as the most important unit of analysis is how anticolonial solidarity begins to materialize in research.

Rather than emphasizing commonality that breeds superficial forms of conviviality and paternalism (De Lissoy & Brown, 2013), I view anticolonial solidarity in DLBE as rooted in a critical recognition of difference in our relationship to colonialism (De Lissoy & Brown, 2013; Mignolo, 2005). Colonialism is pervasive, but not everyone is affected in the same ways. Therefore, as the field moves forward, it is not enough to simply center people and their contexts; it is essential that this is founded on critical consciousness, like Chaparro's piece illustrates. Moreover, it must be accompanied by the continuous interrogation and challenging of the normativity of Western-centric/colonial educational frameworks and practices that perpetuate epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988), as revealed in Alvarado's piece. In sum, an anticolonial solidarity involves the collective efforts formed among stakeholders—including students, educators, families, community members and researchers—to resist and dismantle colonial systems of oppression and exploitation that manifest in the daily realities of peoples' lives.

As we engage in the process of answerability, a vision of anticolonial solidarity would help us ask potent questions: Does my research reinforce normative/colonial and cartesian notions of learning or ways of knowing? Does it undermine Indigenous ways of knowing? Does it recognize and legitimize learning in communities? Who gets to learn from it? What knowledge systems does my research build upon? Whose language practices are privileged in my research? Whose voices are included and whose are excluded? Does my work contribute to the erasure of Indigenous and other racialized peoples?

A vision of anticolonial solidarity would help center racialized language users and advocate for self-determination, language rights, cultural sustenance, and the validation of Indigenous and minoritized languages in DLBE. Moreover, it would aim to reclaim the relational role of language for human connection, to make sense of the world, and to be a vehicle for agency to name one's own realities. Importantly, a vision of critical solidarity would aim to counter the prevalence of research and knowledge as property, insisting on widening its reach, clarity, and usefulness to the communities and people whom it is intended to serve.

Conclusion

Integrating the principle of answerability in both research and practice is essential for cultivating a vision of anticolonial solidarity in DLBE. A vision of anticolonial solidarity in DLBE

is the bridge envisioned by Anzaldúa and Moraga (1981) that Kasun's poem invokes. It is the abolitionist co-conspiracy manifested in action and not just in presence as Love (2019) asserts. This approach can help reclaim the radical roots of bilingual education, ensuring the field remains accountable to the communities it serves and contributes to a more ethical and socially transformative future.

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