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# Fact or Fiction? Exploring Assumptions About ESL Writers

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# Fact or Fiction? Exploring Assumptions about ESL Writers



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## But first, a few definitions:

- **ESL:** English as a Second Language
  - Multilingual students
  - Second language students/writers
  - Emergent bilinguals
- **L1:** First language
- **L2:** Second language
- **SLA:** Second Language Acquisition

# Assumptions about Language Learning in Legal Contexts

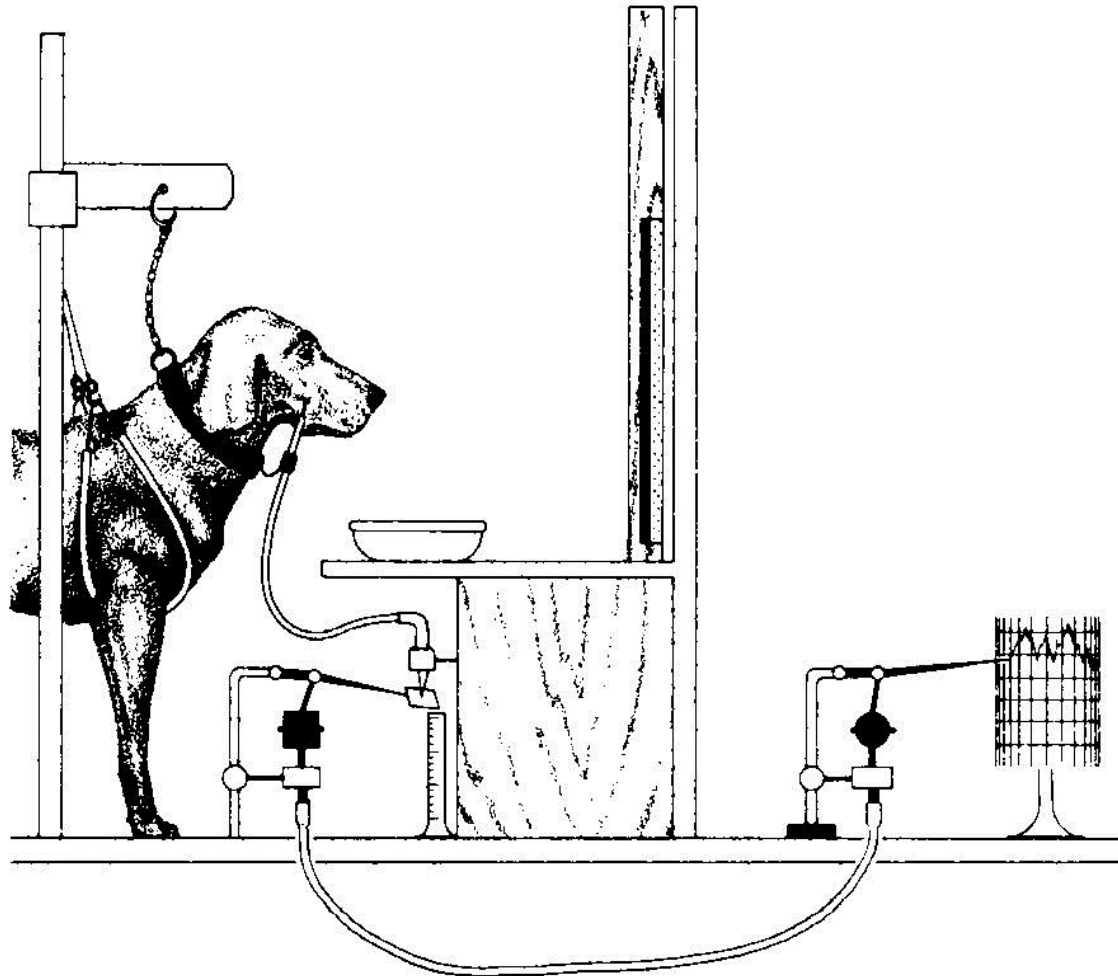
## 2008 law journal article: “Can successful lawyers think in different languages?”

“Over time **their brains will transition** into mainly formulating their sentences in the native language of the country in which they are studying **instead of their native languages.** Their vocabularies will grow and they will slowly **be liberated from language-related limitation of expression.** [...] If they are able to do so, their professional communication will likely **become indistinguishable from attorneys who are native speakers.**”

## 2008-2009 law review article on teaching international students:

“These kinds of exercises [e.g., storytelling] accomplish something linguists and other theorists advocate as necessary — **immersion**, via which acculturating individuals **avoid using their native language dictionaries, or even communicating in their native language** during their **period of conversion to proficiency** in a new language.”

# Language Learning as Behavioral Conditioning



# Language Learning as Input Processing

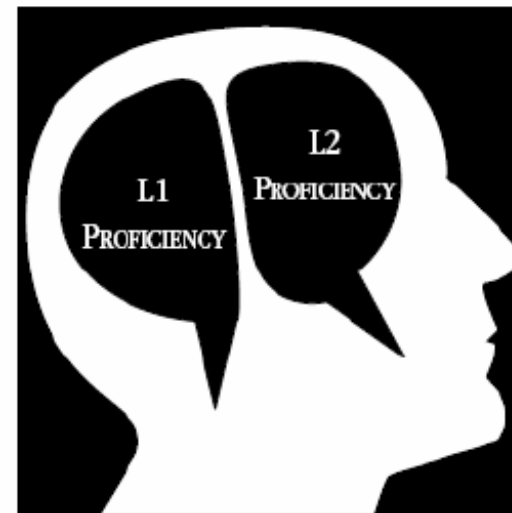




# Balanced Bilingualism, or the “Two Solitudes” Model



## THE SEPARATE UNDERLYING PROFICIENCY (SUP) MODEL OF BILINGUAL PROFICIENCY



**Figure 1.**  
The Separate Underlying Proficiency Model  
(Cummins, 2005)



“Two  
languages in  
one head? No  
one can live at  
that speed!”

-Eddie Izzard,  
“Dress to Kill”

## Assumptions about Language Learning

- Languages (and cultures) are discrete cognitive systems that cannot be activated simultaneously
- SLA is an automatic, internal, purely cognitive process in which the learner is largely passive
- SLA is triggered by exposure to sufficient amounts of L2 input
- Use of the learner's L1 interferes with this cognitive process
- The goal of language learning is to become indistinguishable from a monolingual speaker of the target language

# Current Metaphors in SLA

# Language Learning as Ecology



# Flexible Bilingualism



# The Interdependence Hypothesis (Cummins, 2005)

## THE COMMON UNDERLYING PROFICIENCY (CUP) MODEL OF BILINGUAL PROFICIENCY

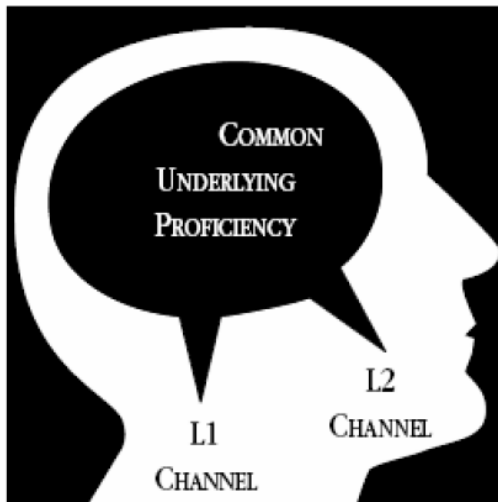


Figure 2.  
The Common Underlying  
Proficiency Model

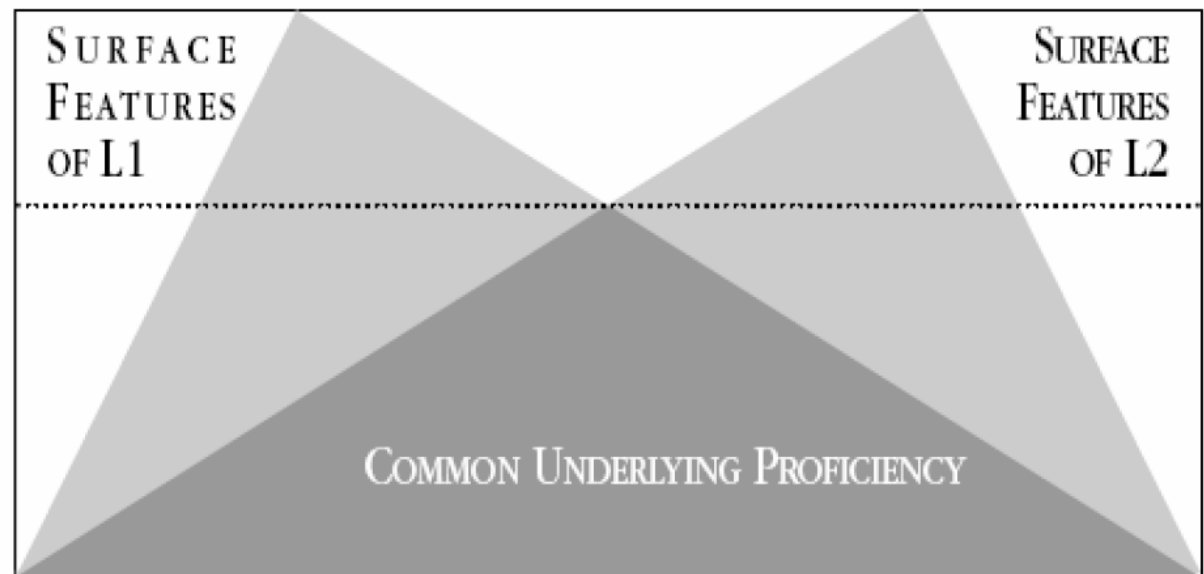


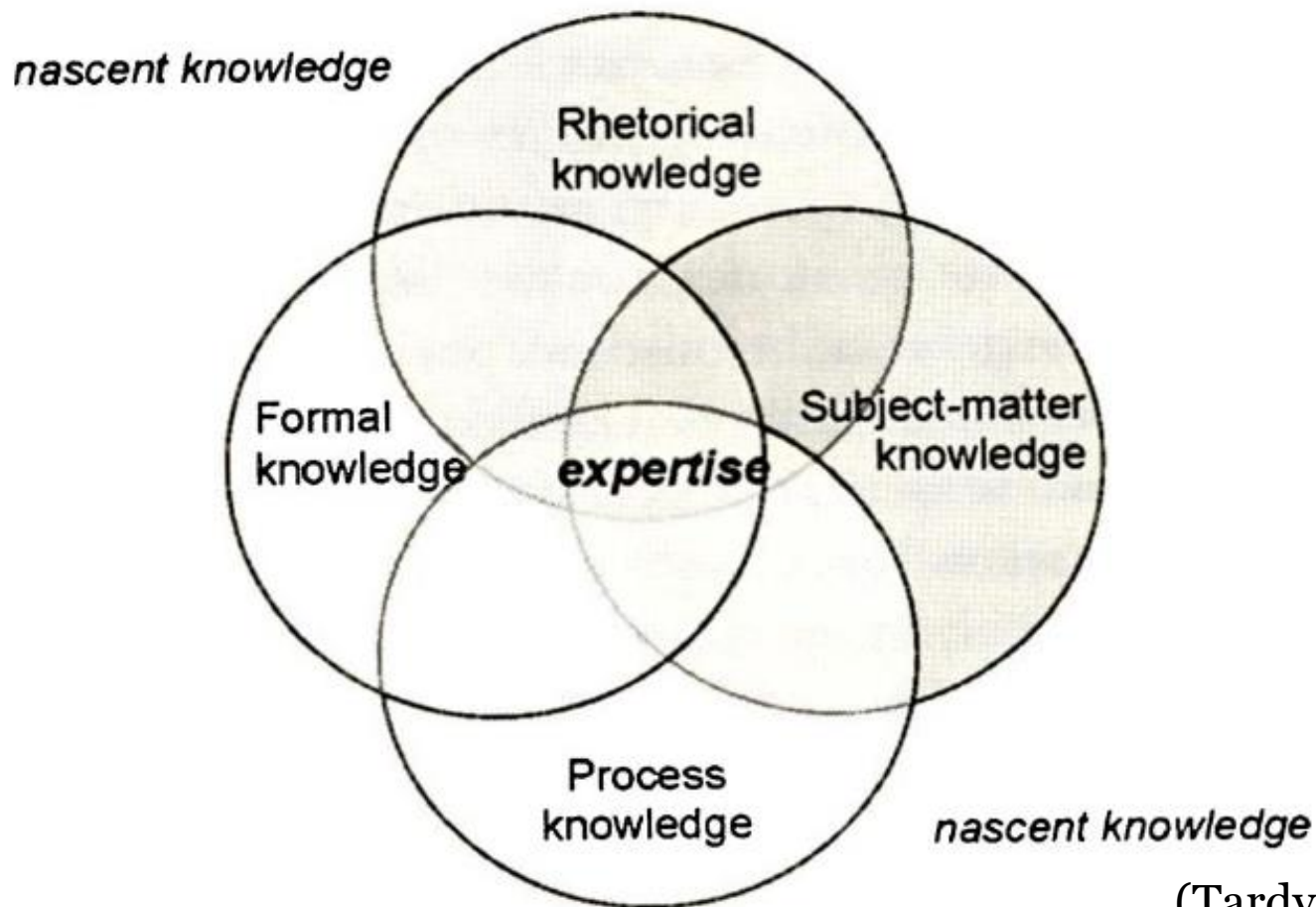
Figure 3. The Dual-Iceberg Representation of Bilingual Proficiency

# Assumptions in These Models

- Languages (and cultures) are not discrete, independent systems but build instead on a shared underlying proficiency
- Language learning is both cognitive and social
- Learners have agency and orient to the affordances in the environment that they recognize as consistent with their own learning goals
- Both L1 and L2 resources are valuable affordances for language learning
- The goal of language learning is to broaden the range of contexts in which a learner can participate effectively



# Illustration: Interdependence and Genre Knowledge



(Tardy, 2009)

**No silver bullet, alas.**

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