**WHITE FLAGS** (differences) vs. **“RED FLAGS”** (signs of disorder)

1. Grammatical errors present (similar to early L2 skills) - Examples: misuse of pronouns (she/he, etc.), lack of possessive markers (john book), double negatives; these will be present for a long time and could transfer onto writing as well. Ideally (per research), teachers will focus on content (to check for learning) rather than on form. CAUTION: the student does not have/misuses structures that do exist in L1 (e.g., Spanish plurals are made mostly by adding /s/, so a Spanish-speaking student should be saying mouses, deers, cars; if no plural marker is present in L1, consider it a red flag)

2. Dialectal differences based on sound repertoire in L1- Examples: a Korean-speaking student may say ‘mik’ for ‘milk’; a Spanish-speaking EL may say ‘is der’ for ‘it’s there’. Depending on the first language, the student may never ‘hear’ the sound or sound combination and thus, never lose their ‘accent’. CAUTION: the student does not have/misuses sounds that do exist in L1 (e.g., Spanish-speaking student says ‘to’ for ‘go’. Both sounds exist in Spanish and he also substitutes them in L1. Red flag about possible speech weaknesses)

3. Code-switching (word, phrase, sentence level)- this only indicates a continuum of growing language abilities; eventually, both languages (ideally) will be almost equal so the student can use only one to completely express a message without having to support it with another language. CAUTION: Student *depends* on code-switching to communicate at all times. Not pragmatically appropriate with mono-lingual speakers (Red flag about social language and awareness of other “codes” used in different situations)

4. Language loss- L1 is lost when L2 is being used more, thus L1 is weakening as L2 is emerging. Not very easy to differentiate (from a possible true deficit), but it happens very often. The first language was not completely developed when the second was introduced and if L2 begins to dominate communication opportunities, then L1 loss happens. CAUTION: Red flags may be that parents report weaknesses in L1 before L2 was introduced; L1 and L2 show weaknesses in same areas/tasks (L1 deficit may be impacting L2 development)
5. **Silent period** - Not always part of an EL student’s process; it could entail 1-2 years of truly minimal expressive language (even with L1 speakers in school). 

   CAUTION: If parents indicate home communication is fine, then it is a silent period issue. If NO oral expression (in L1 or L2) after some time, consider it a red flag as social communication takes place before any classroom participation is expected (it may resemble selective mutism where the student speaks at home but is silent at school; an anxiety disorder)

6. **Quality and quantity of L1 and L2 (school vs. home)** - Better L1 (higher level of proficiency relates often to parent educational level) supports better L2 and promotes *balanced bilingualism*. We often see *subtractive bilingualism*. 

   CAUTION: Student struggles to show adequate language skills despite factors such as high parental education level, bilingual home, siblings with no difficulties, etc.

7. **Poor social language with peers of similar background** - Different cultures often mean different behaviors (e.g., eye contact, hand shake, physical proximity, gender-defined expectations, etc.), therefore cultural *awareness* is essential when trying to determine if nonverbal language is not appropriate. 

   CAUTION: Consider it a red flag if the student is not demonstrating typical behaviors (nonverbal and verbal) as compared with other students/speakers/members of the same cultural group. Newest research in language disorders point to social language/interactions that are not *culturally* appropriate as possible indicators of language disorders (and other disorders such as Autism).

   **In summary….**

   - Identifying communication disorders is most difficult when background includes another language (and a different culture)
   - Limited experiences (in using a language) CAN BE solely responsible for communication differences/ difficulties
   - Use a team approach to investigate or ‘eliminate’
   - No absolutes, no simple cases, no assumptions, no generalizations! These students are unique