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Vally Lytra (2023) Appraising the ‘multilingual turn’ in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics. In: S., Ainsworth, D., Griffiths, G., Macrory, and Pahl, K. (eds) *Multimodality and Multilingualism. Towards an Integrative Approach*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 3-14.

Introduction to Part 1: Appraising the ‘multilingual turn’ in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics

The notion of the ‘multilingual turn’ has been widely used in applied linguistic and sociolinguistic research to denote a heightened analytical focus on multilingual language use across a wide range of contexts and participants (Conteh & Meier 2014, May 2014). Linguistic diversity has been spurred by the intensification of human mobility within and across national borders and the diversification of people’s migration trajectories coupled by the new possibilities for education, work and leisure opened by digital communication. Yet, this renewed analytical focus on multilingual language use obscures the fact that multilingualism is not a recent phenomenon. Writing from what is metaphorically called a ‘southern’ perspective, Heugh (2018) remind us that many societies across Africa and Asia have long and complex histories of linguistic diversity and that “the majority of multilingual communities of the world continue to live beyond Europe and North America” (: 342).

The one nation-one language ideology that underpins state-sponsored monolingualism is a foundational component of modern nation state building. May (2019) cautions against “an ethnocentric and ahistorical view of multilingualism” that ignores multilingual realities prior to the advent of nationalism and the nation-state and constructs multilingualism as a new and primarily urban phenomenon (: 125). Instead, Kramersch (2012) stresses the importance of taking a contextually embedded and historically grounded approach to the study of multilingualism. Taken together these scholars argue for a plural, heterogenous and multidimensional view of multilingualism that recognises its “many different iterations” and investigates tensions, dilemmas, and contradictions in the experiences of “contemporary multilingualisms” (Heugh 2018: 348). The four chapters in this section pay head to these concerns by bringing together ethnographically engaged studies from interactions between teachers and students in primary and secondary schools in Mauritius and the UK (Mahadeo-Doorgakant and Higgins respectively), between home and international students during theatre society sessions in a UK Higher Education institution (Ghosh) and lawyer-client consultations preceding asylum law hearings in Belgium (Jacobs).

Researching language repertoires, practices, and identities

The ‘multilingual turn’ has been anchored within a broader epistemological turn in the social sciences that has taken place in the last three to four decades from essentialist and unitary to social constructionist and post-structuralist perspectives. Critiques of the language-nation-state nexus have propelled scholars of multilingualism to rethink language, culture and identity from hermetically sealed and fixed social categories tied to a particular inheritance (e.g., of ethnicity, nationality, religion) to more fluid and dynamic understandings. This conceptual shift has been premised on understandings of languages as social and ideological constructions. It has refocused the analysis of language from code to multilingual repertoires

of meaning-making resources and identities located in local, translocal and transnational contexts (Heller 2007, Makoni & Pennycook 2007). By denaturalising the notion of a unitary language, our analytical gaze zooms in the “plurality of differentially shared styles, registers and genres” (Blommaert & Rampton 2011: 4). Language repertoires are, thus, conceived as “biographically organized complexes of resources” that “follow the rhythms of human lives” (Blommaert and Backus 2011: 9). The notion of language repertoire attempts to capture the dynamic nature of language and its contextual and biographical embeddedness (Busch 2012). Rymes (2014) extended the notion of repertoire beyond languages, registers, and genres to “communicative repertoire”. This includes a wider range of meaning-making resources comprised of “gesture, dress, posture, and even knowledge of communicative routines, familiarity with types of food or drink, and mass media references including phrases, dance moves, and recognizable intonation patterns that circulate via actors, musicians, and other superstars” (: 9).

The four chapters in this section sit within a repertoire approach to language and while the analytical focus is on language practices, authors touch upon how language as one kind of meaning-making resource -albeit central- is intertwined with other meaning-making resources, artifacts, and modalities. In this respect, the studies point to new ways of expanding the meaning of language, to presenting language “as a part of a semiotic assemblage of relations between humans, objects and artefacts” (Lytra et al 2022: 2) . Inspired by a translanguaging approach to pedagogy (García and Wei 2014) in Sophie Higgins study, the teacher/researcher seeks to activate and leverage the full gamut of a group of London secondary school students’ semiotic resources to engage in a series of arts-based multilingual and multimodal activities against the grain of hegemonic societal and institutional monolingualism in the context of an extra-curricular project. Yesha Devi Mahadeo-Doorgakant takes us to multilingual and multicultural Mauritius where the dominant national political discourse is one of “acceptance, tolerance and celebration of diversity” (Auleer Owodally 2016: 161) and “where” as the author confirms “languages interact fluidly with each other and do not remain in rigid silos” in everyday life. Through a heteroglossic lens (Blackledge and Creese 2010) the author charts and juxtaposes a pair of primary school children’s language and other communicative resources and artefacts (e.g., singing, a book) across formal and informal learning spaces. Both chapters foreground the conceptual pull of linguistic fluidity: they seek to capture students’ creative and innovative communicative practices and they argue for the pedagogical potential of flexible language practices that allows for movement between languages and opens new forms of knowledge and identities (Canagarajah 2011, Panagiotopoulou et al 2020, Wei & Lin 2019).

This conceptual repositioning of language is in line with a broader questioning of fixed and separate framings of identities and the traditional modernist view of essentialist linguistic identities and homogeneous speech communities that erases linguistic plurality and identity fluidity in the national imagination (Pujolar 2007). Instead, identities are viewed as emergent, dynamic, and discursively constructed (Palvenko & Blackledge 2004). Speakers mobilise different language varieties, registers, genres, and accents that create indexical links between linguistic forms and social meanings to negotiate situated self- and other identity positionings in social interaction (Bucholtz & Hall 2005). Priyanki Gosh examines naming and self-naming practices among a group of home and international students engaging in joint theatre activities at a UK university and illustrates how these practices are used to perform and construct contextually marked social identities associated with race and ethnicity. The study aligns with the emergent field of raciolinguistics which investigates the crucial role language plays in processes of racialisation, “how speakers ‘do’ race and ethnicity in interaction” and

“the impact of racism on those who experience race as an everyday lived reality” (Alim 2016: 5). Marie Jacobs investigates the process of entextualisation that asylum narratives undergo during legal counselling interactions between lawyers, clients, and interpreters. The author illustrates how a credible refugee identity is constructed by privileging the institutional voice that marginalises the applicant’s voice, rendering them “a spectator to the discursive construction of his own identity”. Both studies point to the nuances of how individuals understand and construct themselves and others, how rather than being stable and predetermined, identities can shift across contexts and how ideologies of language, race, and ethnicity shape speakers’ identity positionings but also how speakers can question these ideologies, for instance, in the way in which the asylum procedure treats asylum seekers’ testimonies. The next section focuses on some of the tensions, dilemmas, and struggles all four chapters foreground in understanding present day linguistic diversity in education and society.

Tensions, dilemmas, and struggles

A key tension that emerges across the chapters has to do with the ideological constraints of monolingual ideologies that operate in education and society more broadly and how they cascade down homes, communities, schools, and other institutional settings. In so doing, they construct what Lin (2015) refers to as “hierarchical bi/multilingualism” that “essentialis[es] bi/multilingual language practices and identities forcing what are fuzzy, dynamic and fluid practices into separate language and identity categories with tight, discrete boundaries” (: 21). The students’ initial resistance and discomfort to the teacher/researcher’s prompts to use the heritage language in their text-making in Liggins’ study painfully drives home the extent to which the dominant monolingual mindset prevalent in mainstream schools in England can hinder students from deploying their entire semiotic repertoires for learning and social identification. Emenike’s response “I just speak English” to the teacher/researcher’s prompt that “we are all plurilingual” reminded me of a personal story and the consequences of the monolingual norm which I wish to share below in the form of an ethnographic vignette.

Vignette 1: Athan’s page marker

When my son Athan was about 6 years old, he made a page marker. He cut a piece of thick yellow paper into a long thin strip and used a jugged scissors to create a zig zag pattern on the side. Then, he wrote in Greek on the side «Αυτός είναι ο σελιδοδείκτης του Άθαν» (this is Athan’s pagemaker). When he finished making the page marker, he showed it to his grandmother who was visiting from Greece. My mother admired the craftsmanship and praised Athan for the accurate spelling of the admittedly long and complicated word «σελιδοδείκτης» (page marker). She then suggested that Athan takes the page marker to school to show it to his teacher. To which Athan replied: «Τα ελληνικά είναι για το σπίτι» (Greek is for home). My mother responded that she was confident his teacher would love to see his work but Athan shrugged and moved on to do something else. The marker remained on the living room table, never making it to school.



Image 1: Athan's page marker

The story of Athan's page marker speaks to the dilemmas of linguistic diversity multilingual students face at different levels and how these levels are entangled: At an institutional level, Athan was going at the time to a dual medium English/French international school in francophone Switzerland which boasted in the school website of having a bilingual programme and over 40 different languages spoken in the school. In practice, the school supported an ideology of "separate bilingualism" (Blackledge & Creese 2010) that separated languages for learning and where access to the academic varieties of English and French taught at school were expected to guarantee educational success. Moreover, despite celebrating the students' rich language and cultural experiences, their multilingual repertoires and intercultural capabilities beyond English and French were not afforded the same pedagogical legitimacy. From the perspective of the family, this story is illustrative of our family's overt efforts to develop our children's Greek literacy and the value we attached to sustaining Greek language, culture, and identity in a transnational context. Athan's developing literacy capabilities in Greek were nourished at home and in the Greek complementary (community) school he had been attending on Saturday mornings from the age of four. Athan's text-making at home strongly asserts how he leveraged his multilingual and multimodal resources beyond the official languages of schooling. Yet, this story also shows how our family efforts to sustain Greek literacy was not a "neutral family matter" (Curdt-Christiansen 2018: 429). It collided with the school's dominant language ideologies that valorised the official languages of instruction only. Indeed, Athan's decision not to share his text-making with his teacher indicates an acute awareness of which languages were deemed appropriate to share at school and which were not, in other words that "multilingualism in hierarchically arranged" (Heugh 2018: 358). The story points to the messiness of lived multilingualism, the tensions of navigating both complementary and competing ideologies, practices, goals, expectations, and desires.

The tension over the normalcy of students' everyday multilingualism and the compartmentalisation of languages at school is further unpicked by Mhadeo-Doorgakant. In Mauritian primary school classrooms different linguistic resources (English, French, Kreol Morisien) were assigned different functions and visibility in informal and formal school talk, and teachers played a central role in consolidating language hierarchies. Despite government language policies to create a multilingual educational system that includes Kreol Morisien as a legitimate language resource for learning alongside the two colonial languages, the former continues to remain in the margins of classroom discourse. Canagarajah (2011) and García and Wei (2014) among others have challenged approaches to bilingual education that are based on a pedagogy of separating languages. They support pedagogical practices that leverage students' entire language repertoires and all meaning-making resources in an integrated way for effective teaching and learning. The purposeful use of code-switching, translation and translanguaging can provide students with meaningful opportunities to learn, especially when the languages of schooling are different from the languages students and teachers speak at home and their communities. While such flexible language practices are common in many classroom settings worldwide, they are often stigmatised or remain hidden in informal interactional moments due to prevailing purist and monolingual ideologies. Moreover, students' language resources and cultural knowledge that are positioned outside the school's narrowly defined norm are often silenced or ignored.

At the same time, it is important to stress that educational systems are expected to teach in the academic variety that is associated with access to educational attainment and success. This expectation privileges standard written over vernacular, oral and diasporic varieties and dominant cultural knowledge and practices and reinforces the legitimacy of language separation pedagogies. To address this tension, Long et al (2013), building on work on culturally relevant and critical pedagogies, advocate “embracing home and community resources” while “paying attention to the development of students’ proficiency with languages and literacies of power” (: 420). This complementary focus has the potential of disrupting what counts as privileged knowledge and language and cultural practices and creating opportunities for “new learning that simultaneously challenge[s] the status quo” (: 431).

Chapters also highlight struggles over “doing” identity work and how language users exercise agency, voice, and creativity. The international and local University students in Gosh’s study show us how the performative and situated construction of the self and the ‘other’ through naming practices involves taking up, resisting, and reworking subject positions, emphasising or downplaying affiliation and co-membership. International students, for instance, strategically used the “indexical bleaching” of names (Bucholtz 2016) as agentic acts of self-positioning to deracialise unfamiliar names. Yet, all international students’ names were not treated the same way: different students’ self-naming practices received different responses from home students, which opened or closed opportunities for group membership and belonging. As Gosh cogently argues, “for the international students at least, their names along with their ‘look’ and accented voice becomes a proxy for establishing their foreignness”. The study brings to the fore the tension between the theatre society’s goal to construct a space for intercultural contact that welcomes all students and processes of racialisation. In so doing, it drives home the tension between our analytical understandings of race and ethnicity as social and ideological constructs and “their endurance as social realities for subjugated racial and ethnic minorities, (im)migrants and other oppressed groups” (Alim 2016: 6). Jacobs alerts us to the complexities between the lawyer’s efforts to maximize their client’s chances of being granted asylum and “the act of rendering the client voiceless within the legal consultation” to ensure that the asylum authorities are provided with the institutional narrative they expect. At the same time, the author illustrates that clients expressed concerns about the entextualisation of their testimonies, for instance, concerns about whether the entextualised version of their interview is an accurate reflection of their own accounts.

Taken together the chapters sensitise us to the tensions, dilemmas and struggles around how linguistic diversity is understood and interpreted across a range of local contexts, at particular times and places. They illustrate how negotiations of knowledge, linguistic and cultural expertise, and identity articulations intersect and at times collide with broader discourses and ideologies of language, race, and ethnicity. They highlight the importance of attending to the ideological dimension and, thus, push us to interrogate whose voices get heard and whose get silenced or ignored and who decides for “languages and intercultural communication are never just neutral” (Phipps & Guilherme 2004: 1). They urge us to consider the implications of our research for social transformation and for supporting approaches to education that are based on principles of equality and social justice. Looking into the future, a translingual-transcultural orientation to education premised on a view of “language-as-a-resource” (Ruiz 1984) can open “implementational spaces for multiple languages, literacies, and identities in classroom, community, and society” (Hornberger 2002: 45). In the final section, I present one such case from my own research in language education.

What have we learned and where do we go next?

A translingual-transcultural orientation offers researchers, teachers, and students a dynamic and inclusive lens favouring a broader understanding of language and language education that encompasses and combines multimodal and multisensory modes (Lytra et al, 2022). Such an orientation offers the possibility for language learners not only to make use of their entire semiotic resources for meaning-making in particular localities and practices but also to develop creativity (Moore et al 2020), build critical metalinguistic awareness (García & Kleifgen 2019, Little & Kirwan 2019) and nurture new ways of knowing and being in the world (Kramsch 2009, Ros i Solé et al 2020). Building on the little studied educational context of international schools I discussed in the previous section I would now like to briefly explore what happens when such an orientation is introduced and enacted in so-called “home languages” classes whose purpose is to sustain students’ language and literacy skills in their home languages, cultures, and identities. While these classes are usually offered with an additional fee as part of the schools’ after-school programme, there is a pervasive institutional culture of separation between the schools’ curriculum and pedagogy and that of the home languages classes and home languages teachers tend to have limited interaction with the schools’ class and language teachers.

My case comes from a CPD project called the “Home language collaborative project: Our languages, our stories” which I co-led at an English-medium international school in francophone Switzerland between November 2019 and February 2020 (Lytra et al 2020). Together with the school’s home languages coordinator, six of the home languages teachers teaching Greek, Portuguese, French, Mandarin, Italian and Russian and thirty students, we sought to problematise the peripheral position of students’ home languages in the school’s curriculum, pedagogy, and policy with the aim of valorising home language teaching and learning and raising the visibility of the home languages programme for the whole school. Emphasising dialogue and collaboration between researchers and participants, we sought to co-construct pedagogical spaces that not only acknowledged multilingualism and linguistic diversity but also created opportunities for students to critically reflect upon, question and integrate their multilingual resources and rich cultural expressions that often faded into the background in their everyday school lives as legitimate resources for learning. The translingual-transcultural orientation of the project sought to unite the personal aspects of language education focusing on students’ voices and desires, biographies, and family histories with the aesthetic that posits an expansive and multisensorial understanding of language and the political that challenges dominant ideologies and discourses that can isolate and ignore students’ languages, literacies, and heritages that define home languages classes. Challenging that silence, we illustrate what might happen when students and language educators are encouraged to take risks and engage in new ways of meaning-making that open up unforeseen possibilities for doing language education (Lytra et al. 2022). The home languages teachers worked with their students to co-design and co-produce multimodal texts that were shared with the entire school to celebrate International Mother Tongue Day (21 February 2020). Through project-based and arts-based approaches to language learning, they illustrated the richness the use of the students’ multimodal, aesthetic, and affective resources brought to language and language learning (Moore et al. 2020).

Despite the school’s support for home language maintenance at a school language policy level, in practice, students initially perceived their home languages as a private matter that was disconnected from their everyday school lives where rigid boundaries divided curricular and extra-curricular activities- not unlike the students in Liggins’ study. In the image below,

Mattia's autobiographical text-making complexifies labels, such as languages as medium of instruction, foreign languages, and home languages, as he unites his different linguistic and cultural threads (Italian, French, and English) and transnational experiences to enable and create new contexts for learning, possibilities of inclusion and the presentation of self and community.

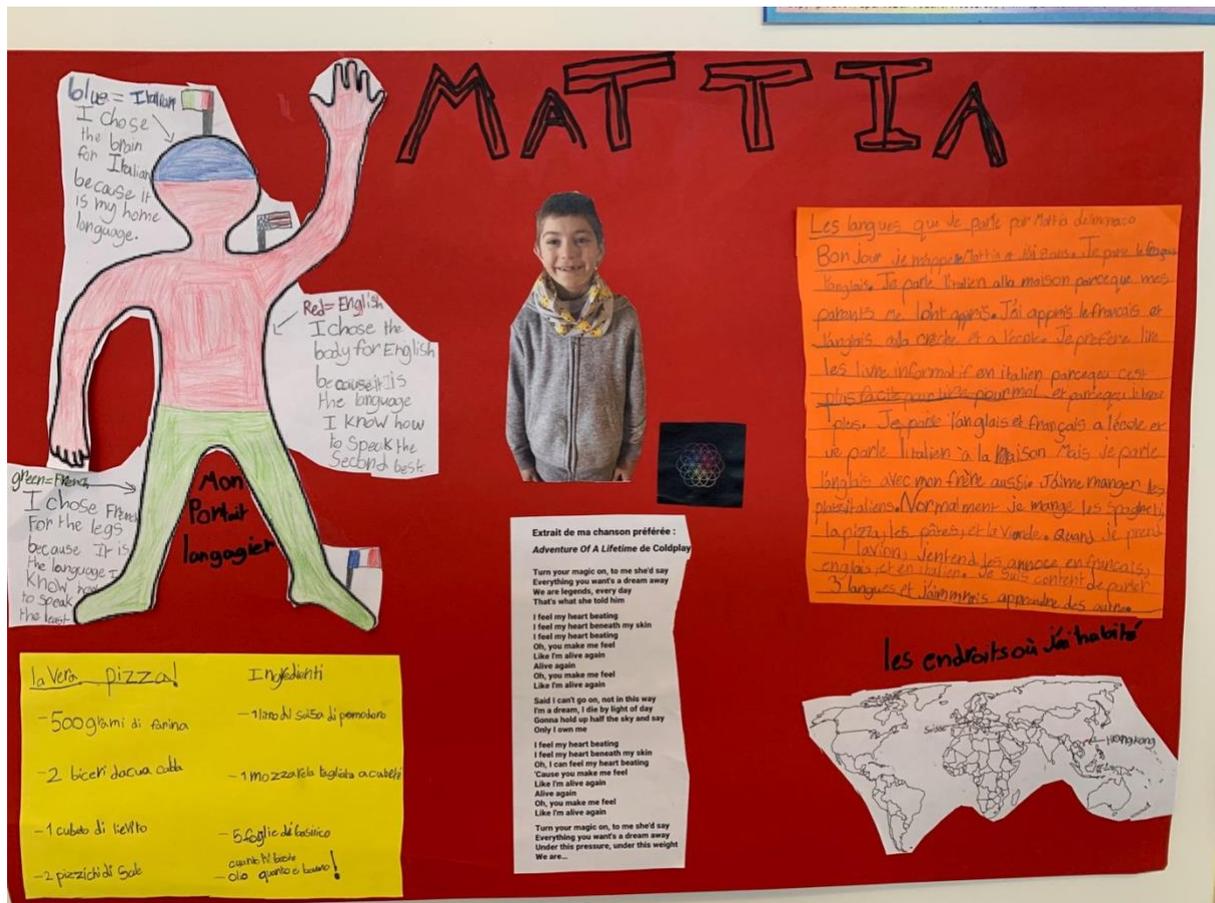


Image 2: Mattia's multilingual and multimodal collage

Mattia's multilingual and multimodal collage offers an expansive view of language and language learning, where language is just one of the modes for meaning-making. He unites his language portrait and autobiographic language narrative with his love for "authentic pizza" ("la vera pizza") and the music of rock band Coldplay and a map of the world tracing the changing circumstances of his family life. Embracing the full range of his semiotic resources, Mattia's text-making broadens our understanding of language and literacy learning in French home language class beyond a narrowly defined monolingual norm that points to "openness to other worlds, other languages, other ways of expressing oneself across a range of genres" (Phipps 2022: 249). At the same time, it highlights the ongoing development of his literacy skills in the academic variety of French valued by the school, which was one of the main reasons his parents enrolled him in the French home language class. His text-making brings to the fore Long et al.'s (2013) assertion that recognising and leveraging students' multilingualism as a medium of learning in each setting goes hand in hand with developing

students' academic capabilities in the academic varieties of power and socio-economic aspiration. The text-making opens a pedagogical space for reconciling formal and informal literacy practices, different registers, language varieties and ideologies and for encouraging active learner participation, experimentation, and a sense of ownership. The movement towards this pedagogical space creates a "translanguaging space" theorised by Wei (2011) as "a social space for the multilingual language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance and making it into a lived experience" (: 1223).

The case study from the field of language education along with the chapters in this section illustrate new ways that we can listen to what is happening on the ground, to the everyday multilingual realities of most of the world's speakers and the "language planning from below" they engage in (Heugh 2018: 355). These lived multilingualisms encourage us to seek out an expanded view of language that is situated within broader meaning-making processes connecting different actors, agencies, and practices in a complex web of relationships contingent to local circumstances while remaining attentive to the power of dominant discourses and ideologies and their constraining structures. In so doing, they suggest alternative ways that new listenings can be made possible.

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