



A Multilingual Approach: Conclusions and Future Perspectives: Afterword

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This article summarizes the individual contributions to this special issue and discusses the advantages and implications of adopting a multilingual approach. The advantages include the possibility of examining language practices in context and providing insights about the way languages are acquired and used. This multilingual approach also opens new paths for research and language assessment and has implications for language teaching.

THE ARTICLES IN THIS VOLUME DISCUSS SOME issues of multilingualism in educational contexts. Most articles refer to multilingualism in high school or at a university, although Li Wei looks at complementary schools that are not part of regular education. The different perspectives in this collection depend on whether the focus is on interaction in the classroom, as in the articles by García, Sylvan, and Witt and Li Wei, students' production on tasks and tests such as in the contributions by Cenoz and Gorter and Shohamy, or the process and development of writing strategies as described by Canagarajah. The learning contexts reflect a diversity of multilingual situations. Franceschini mentions a wide range of language types when defining multilingualism: national, regional, minority, migrant, and sign languages. We could also add English as a category of its own because of its international status. In fact, all the studies reported in this issue refer to situations in which English is learned in contact with other languages. Cenoz and Gorter refer to a situation that combines English, a national language (Spanish), and a regional minority lan-

guage (Basque). Li Wei reports on data obtained in a Mandarin school and a Cantonese school in Britain. Mandarin and Cantonese are immigrant languages in this context and English is the national language. García, Sylvan, and Witt also look at immigrant children in an English-speaking country but in the context of Spanish-speaking immigrants in the United States. Canagarajah reports a study conducted at an American university in which an Arabic-speaking foreign student is taking an academic writing course in English. When discussing evaluation, Shohamy looks at immigration in Israel and particularly the combination of Russian, Hebrew, and English. McNamara discusses French as a colonial language when referring to Derrida and also looks at the languages used by immigrants in contact with national languages. In sum, the characteristics of the sociolinguistic contexts dealt with in this special issue reflect important differences of status among the languages involved. When looking at the articles in this collection, we can also see that some immigrant or minority languages are used in classroom situations, whereas others are excluded.

In spite of the diversity of languages and contexts involved, this collection of articles shares a multilingual approach. This approach focuses on multilingual speakers, not on individual

languages. The articles in this issue take all of the languages in the multilingual speaker's repertoire into account. This approach goes from the analysis of the intersection between languages, as in the case of codeswitching in the classroom (see Lin & Martin, 2005; Li Wei & Martin, 2009; Li Wei, this issue) to the analyses of relationships between the different languages in the multilingual students' repertoire, as reported in the article by Cenoz and Gorter. This perspective is completely different from the traditional second language acquisition (SLA) approach that only focuses on the second language, and it goes against strong traditions in bilingual and multilingual education that isolate languages (see also Cummins, 2008). However, this multilingual perspective that uses all the linguistic resources that multilingual speakers have at their disposal seems to be natural for multilinguals, according to their own reports (Todeva & Cenoz, 2009).

Which are the advantages of a multilingual approach? In this issue, we argue that a multilingual approach has important advantages over the traditional "one language at a time" approach. The advantages can be summarized as follows.

A multilingual approach examines language practices in context. The context is usually the classroom, as it can be seen in the articles by García, Sylvan, and Witt or Li Wei. These practices can also take place outside the classroom, as in the case of the Internet conversation in Cenoz and Gorter's article or the development of academic writing reported by Canagarajah. Contexts in which more than one language is used at a time are common among multilingual speakers. Research on codeswitching shows how multilinguals take elements from the different languages they know and switch between languages in very creative ways. Multilinguals also use other languages in their repertoire at another level. In multilingual contexts, multilingual speakers are often exposed to input in one or more languages that may or may not be the ones they are using in a specific context. These practices, which are similar to the original idea of translanguaging as proposed by Williams (2002), alternate languages in the input and output as a pedagogical tool. This alternation is very common when minority or immigrant languages are involved. For example, multilinguals can be making comments in a minority language while they are watching a sports match on television in the majority language or when they see a billboard written in another language on the street. These types of interactions are characteristic of multilingual speakers, and a multilingual approach focusing on these language practices is

therefore closer to the reality of speakers. Multilingual speakers can also use one language at a time, but the choice of language is linked to the specific context in which the interaction takes place. The language practices of multilingual speakers are shaped during the interaction (see also Kramsch, 2010). In fact, multilingual speakers use their resources in different ways according to the languages spoken by their interlocutors and the sociopragmatic characteristics of the situation. It could be expected that a multilingual speaker is more likely to use only one language when interacting with a monolingual speaker and more languages when interacting with multilingual speakers, but language practices in multilingual settings are more complex than this. A speaker with very limited knowledge of a second language who is not considered multilingual may use some words in his or her second language. This is the case in bilingual and multilingual communities in which people often greet each other in another language, and when people who do not speak English use some words or expressions in English. A multilingual approach, a real "Focus on Multilingualism," as Cenoz and Gorter suggest, looks at all these language practices, which include codeswitching phenomena as well as any other types of language practices, such as translanguaging, codemeshing, or language transfer. The focus on all of these different types of language practices when conducting research on multilingualism in school contexts provides more authentic data than the focus on languages in isolation.

A multilingual approach can provide insights in our understanding of the way languages are acquired and used. A multilingual approach that takes into account all of the languages a multilingual person has experience with provides a different perspective from an approach that looks at one language at a time. This can clearly be seen when looking at the multidirectionality of language transfer (see Cenoz & Gorter, this issue). Traditionally, SLA has ignored other languages in the multilingual speaker's repertoire and has only focused on the effect of the first on the second language. This means that the influence that all of the other languages can have on the target language or the backward influence from the target language to the other languages is ignored. By taking only the first language into consideration, a partial and often inaccurate account of the interaction between languages is given. Another related advantage of a multilingual approach is that when two or more languages are learned at school, it is possible to find out to what extent the elements learned in one language can be

transferred to other languages without being taught as completely new elements. For example, writing a composition in the first, second, or third language shares many characteristics, and the effect of specific strategic training in one language can be transferred to other languages. This could also be the case with grammar structures, vocabulary, phonetics, or pragmatics. Obviously, there are more possibilities to benefit from other languages when they are closer to each other.

A multilingual approach can also be more equitable for multilingual learners. As it can be clearly seen in the articles by Shohamy and McNamara, a multilingual approach, particularly multilingual testing, has social and political dimensions. Franceschini points out that multilingualism is a wide area of research that can be understood in different ways. In school contexts, multilingualism is often associated with incompleteness or deficit because multilinguals are expected to be perfect native speakers of different languages. At the same time, multilinguals, who are often speakers of immigrant and minority languages, go through complex experiences that involve tensions and conflict. In some cases, as McNamara explains when referring to Derrida, multilingualism is even abandoned. In other contexts, such as in the European Union, multilingualism is seen as an added value in society. In contrast, in many other contexts the use of a single language is seen as the ideal situation. Even when multilingualism is promoted, there can be an underlying monolingual view of multilingualism that focuses on only one language at a time, and in most cases, there is an implicit preference for the national language. A multilingual approach in school contexts focuses on individual multilingual speakers and their practices rather than on the national or official language. As such, it values and respects all of the languages that learners have experience with and, without glorifying multilingualism per se, it goes beyond the language policies that promote only national languages. For example, García, Sylvan, and Witt show that by encouraging students to use their home languages, the locus of control lies with the students, and that helps to develop multilingualism. Canaragajah also considers that teaching practices should have the multilingual strategies used by students themselves as the starting point. Shohamy highlights that students should not be penalized for being multilingual and shows evidence indicating that a bottom-up approach in testing that takes the learner's languages as its starting point is more valid and equitable.

A multilingual approach, also called "Focus on Multilingualism," has many advantages, but it also has some limitations. Multilingualism is a very broad area of research and different perspectives are needed. A multilingual approach provides a holistic perspective that has been ignored by many scholars, but an atomistic perspective can also contribute to developing our knowledge of certain aspects of language acquisition and language use in school contexts.

A multilingual approach brings together SLA research, the acquisition of additional languages, and research on bilingualism and multilingualism. This diversity of fields, different conceptualizations, and the increasing importance of other modalities that interact with language as a semiotic system can explain the variety of terms used when referring to the intersection of different languages. Terms such as language transfer, cross-linguistic influence, cross-linguistic interaction, translanguaging, codemixing, codeswitching, and codemeshing are examples of this diversity. The development of a multilingual approach will hopefully help to define some concepts more accurately.

This special issue reports some studies that use a multilingual approach when looking at multilingualism in school contexts. These studies not only provide useful insights about these contexts but also new research perspectives. At the same time, these studies open new paths for future research in several areas:

Multilingual Practices

There is already some research on multilingual language practices that focuses on the use of different languages by multilingual speakers in the classroom (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García, 2009; Heller & Martin-Jones, 2001; Lin & Martin, 2005; Martin-Beltrán, 2010; Li Wei & Martin, 2009). This research has explored different aspects of multilingual interaction, as well as its effect on the development of creativity, identities, and criticality. In general terms, the possibility of using different languages in the classroom has proved to provide an important communicative support for students and for teachers. Most research has taken place in postcolonial countries in Asia or with immigrant students in the United States and the United Kingdom. More studies are needed not only in other geographical contexts but also involving other languages and situations (minority languages, foreign languages, etc.). Furthermore, as Canaragajah points out, it is

necessary to develop teaching practices based on these spontaneous multilingual practices. Another aspect that needs more attention is the interaction between languages and other modalities. In this respect, the study of out-of-school multilingual and multimodal practices needs urgent attention.

Multilingual Assessment

A multilingual approach in assessment is necessary not only as part of a new approach to teaching and research but also in order to moderate the complexities and difficulties many multilingual students face. Shohamy gives some important clues for the development of multilingual assessment, but there is still a long way to go. An important aspect highlighted by Canagarajah (2006) when discussing assessment in English is that the tests have to be based on communities of communication “in relation to the repertoire of codes, discourses, and genres that are conventional for that context” (p. 241). This is certainly the case in multilingual assessment because the linguistic repertoires of the students are different in each context.

The Contribution of a Multilingual Approach to Learning

There is an urgent need to analyze the effect of a multilingual approach on language and content learning. As we have already seen, a multilingual approach can facilitate communication among multilingual speakers in the classroom and reflects the way languages are used by multilinguals in natural contexts. However, in school settings, it is also important to analyze whether languages and other subject matter are taught more efficiently when a multilingual approach is used (see also Ferguson, 2009). Research studies that focus on the effect of this approach on language and content development as compared to a traditional approach could confirm that phenomena such as translanguaging and codeswitching are not only natural but also effective. Another important issue is the influence that the teaching of linguistic and communicative elements in one language can have on other languages. It is necessary to identify the elements that can influence the teaching of other languages or can be taught more efficiently at the same time in different languages in specific multilingual contexts. The implementation of integrated curricula for languages allows for coordination of the different syllabi and might optimize the linguistic resources of multilinguals.

In sum, the articles included in this special issue elaborate on substantial contributions to our knowledge of codemixing in the classroom, as mentioned earlier. This issue goes in the direction of a multilingual approach or a “Focus on Multilingualism” that takes into account all of the languages with which multilingual speakers and learners have experience. A next step will be the implementation of many of the ideas discussed in this issue together with more research studies that can contribute to improving our knowledge of multilingualism in school contexts.

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