

# SYMPOSIUM

This symposium begins with a lead paper that outlines key tenets of plurilingualism and plurilingual pedagogy, and how/why embracing student plurilingualism in pedagogy (re-)presents a paradigm shift. The six papers that follow enable TESOL practitioners and researchers to see and hear school-aged children engaging in plurilingual pedagogy in content-based instruction focusing on science, physical education, and developing English literacy in formal classroom settings, homework clubs and community schools. The symposium contributions provide windows onto the range of forays into plurilingual pedagogies in which educators who are committed to bridging plurilingual students' linguistic capital and teaching English, the language prioritized at school and socially valued in today's global village, are engaging.

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## *Plurilingualism and Curriculum Design: Toward a Synergic Vision*

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Contemporary globalized society is characterized by mobility and change, two phenomena that have a direct impact on the broad linguistic landscape. Language proficiency is no longer seen as a monolithic phenomenon that occurs independently of the linguistic repertoires and trajectories of learners and teachers, but rather shaped by uneven and ever-changing competences, both linguistic and cultural. In the European context, research conducted over the past 20 years in multilingual realities of local communities and societies has brought to the forefront the notion of *plurilingualism*, which is opening up new perspectives in language education. In North American academia, the paradigm shift from linguistic homogeneity and purism to heteroglossic and plurilingual competence in applied linguistics has been observed in the emergence of such concepts as *disinventing languages*, *translanguaging*, and *code-meshing*. Starting from a historical perspective, this article

examines the shared principles upon which such innovative understandings of linguistic competence are based. In particular, it investigates the specificity of plurilingualism as an individual characteristic clearly distinct from multilingualism in the light of different theoretical lenses. The author discusses the potential of such vision together with its implications. Finally, this article offers pedagogical implications for English language education in the North American context, and suggests ways to investigate the new active role that English language learners and teachers can adopt in shaping their process of learning English.

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■ Mobility and change are two major features facing contemporary globalized society (Castles & Miller, 2003). Touching each aspect of our collective and individual lives, this changing landscape implies a redesign of the linguistic forms located and utilized within the global village. No single language is excluded from this process, as migrating populations bring with them a wealth of languages and cultures, which come into contact with the language(s) of their host countries and, as in a chemical reaction, are a catalyst for change. This is only the most visible part of the phenomenon: roles and representations of languages also play a major role, and they, in turn, have crystallized over time, linking with societal and political events.

In this contribution, I use the notion of *plurilingualism*, distinct from multilingualism, as a lens to investigate the present linguistic landscape and its implications for language education. “Plurilingualism allows for the interaction and mutual influence of ... languages in a more dynamic way [than multilingualism]” (Canagarajah & Liynage, 2012, p. 50). Multilingualism keeps languages distinct both at the societal level and at the individual level. It also tends to stress the separate, advanced mastery of each language a person speaks. Plurilingualism, on the contrary, is focused on the fact that languages interrelate and interconnect particularly, but not exclusively, at the level of the individual. It stresses the dynamic process of language acquisition and use, in contrast with coexistence and balanced mastery of languages (Council of Europe, 2001).

Language diversity, exchange, contact, and the coexistence of different languages and cultures—both on a personal and social level—are not just phenomena linked to today’s globalization and mass-migration, but have been cyclically recurrent and even intrinsically present from the beginning of history. Currently, multilingualism remains the norm on a global scale and permeates even the apparent homogeneity of monolingual states. The fundamental socioeconomic changes brought about by globalization have contributed to moving from modernity to postmodernity (Bauman, 1992), and from *solid* to *liquid* modernity (Bauman, 2000). This process has implied going from

the imposition of uniformity, order, and the homogenization of individuals by nation states in an attempt to provide certainties, to a condition characterized by “institutionalized pluralism, variety, contingency and ambivalence” (Bauman, 1992, p. 187). Ambivalence in particular refers to the presence of many contradictory meanings that individual human agents have to choose between (de Vries, Visscher, & Gerritsen, 2005). In this process, no external certainties are provided and “action is not determined by factors outside human control” (de Vries et al., 2005, p. 8).

Until very recently, the construction of linguistic utopias and homogeneous linguistic communities (Pratt, 1987) has been reproduced in linguistics, where “the dominance of monolingual assumptions ... has prevented scholars from appreciating plurilingualism” (Canagarajah & Liyage, 2012, p. 50) and “has hindered the development of plurilingual practices and knowledge” (p. 51). A parallel shift is also evident in applied linguistics, where such ground-breaking notions as *disinventing languages* (Makoni, 2002; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007), *translanguaging* (García, 2009), *code-meshing* (Canagarajah, 2006), *multi-competence* (Cook, 1991, 2007), *polylingualism* (Jørgensen, 2008), and *transidiomatic practices* (Jacquemet, 2005) open up an entire new world of possibilities within the study of plurilingualism.

## **FROM PURENESS TO PLURALITY: A PARADIGM SHIFT AND SOME PRINCIPLES**

Research has started to challenge traditional visions of language learning and teaching. As recently as a few decades ago, the separation and purity of languages was unquestioned, both socially and scientifically (Baker, 1988). Consequently, bilingual education was seen as dangerous, as a source of reduced language proficiency, linguistic insecurity, psychological problems, and exclusion from a language-specific community (Baker, 1988). The language learning practices of social elites did not contradict this vision, as attention was brought to learning selected foreign languages as clearly separate entities with the goal of developing general culture and balanced bilingualism. In recent years, language plurality has started to be seen as a source of positive learner attributes, such as higher cognitive flexibility; linguistic, cultural, and conceptual transfer; and enhanced capacity for abstract, divergent, and creative thinking (Boekmann, Aalto, Atanassoska, & Lamb, 2011). This conceptualization moves beyond language hierarchies and social connotations and, in spite of some resistance, the foundations have been laid for a substantial paradigm shift.

The new and potentially revolutionary aspects of a plurilingual vision are supported in three theoretical domains, each representing lenses through which the phenomenon can be effectively explored:

- (a) The *psychocognitive* perspective, which studies language acquisition mechanisms. A new connectionist paradigm is increasingly predominant in describing the functioning of the brain (Bickes, 2004, p. 38), and the brain of bi/multilinguals is no longer seen as the sum of monolingual brains but rather considered as a complex and distinct system (Bialystok, 2001; Perani et al., 2003).
- (b) The *sociocultural* perspective, which posits that language acquisition occurs in the social sphere and is intrinsically linked to interaction and mediation between individuals, each possessing his or her own complex cultural system and all living within linguistically, culturally, and sociologically defined configurations (Lantolf, 2011).
- (c) The *pedagogical* perspective, a new complex vision of language teaching methodology, supported by the post-method movement (Bell, 2003; García, 2009; Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

The shift from a behaviorist paradigm to seeing language as cognitively developed (García, & Flores, 2012) and socially constructed (Lantolf, 2011) foregrounds the understanding that learning occurs when a new reflective, active process takes place and information can be linked to already existing knowledge. The mother tongue(s) is/are not excluded from this process: every (new) language acquisition modifies the global language competence of individuals and shapes their linguistic repertoires. In turn, errors are no longer seen as pure by-products of interference but also as a way of progressing. More and more, the process of language acquisition is seen as nonlinear, where preexisting linguistic knowledge and competence is taken into consideration, together with experience in language learning, task accomplishment, different aims, conditions, and constraints (Piccardo, 2010b). In this complex vision, learners are called upon to play a very active role. The process of constructing proficiency is dependent on, and enhanced by, a reflective, autonomous attitude in which metacognitive and metalinguistic skills play an important role. The notion of plurilingual and pluricultural competence is able to bring together this plurality of elements and skills.

The adoption of a plurilingualism-inspired pedagogy calls for the definition of certain key principles, applicable from the classrooms level to language policies:

- Teaching and learning of any one language should be seen in conjunction with the overall objective of promoting plurilingualism and linguistic diversity.

- The idea of a curriculum for each language taken in isolation should be replaced by consideration of the role of languages in a general language education, where knowledge, skills, and the ability to learn are transversal and transferable across languages. Synergies would be created between languages with the purpose of reaching a common higher goal.
- The transfer of skills should play a pivotal role and be seen in a cost-efficiency perspective: not only would useless repetition be avoided, but also the greater awareness and self-esteem of learners would potentially optimize learning.

What is at stake in aiming toward developing a plurilingual competence is the idea of minimizing barriers between languages, of adopting a holistic vision, and of focusing on linguistic education in a broader sense, including all languages (L1, L2, L3, and so on), but also different varieties of the same language. Whereas multilingualism focuses on quantity—on considering a series of languages without any particular attention paid to relations between them—plurilingualism insists on the relationships amongst all languages of each individual. Coherently, “dynamic plurilingual pedagogies are being expanded as ways of going beyond traditional diglossic arrangements that compartmentalize languages.... ‘Languaging’ or what students do with language in multilingual spaces is taken up as the defining unit” (García & Flores, 2012, p. 238).

## **WE ARE ALL PLURILINGUAL**

The search for universals—that is, perfect models—and prototypical examples is deeply rooted in the philosophical and scientific vision of the Western world (Piccardo, 2005, 2010a). When Chomsky described human language as a mechanism governed by a series of formal rules, he referred to “an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly” (1965, p. 3). We are now increasingly aware that such a perfect individual does not exist, no more than a stable and perfectly known language exists. As Wandruszka (1979) already pointed out in his seminal work, we live in our own mother tongue in several languages. For example, everyone uses different registers with different audiences and in different situations; people use common foreign words without translating them and employ specific technical vocabularies here and there, even in an incomplete and imperfect way. Besides, some people are more aware than others of word origins and their semantic implications, of metaphorical connotation of words and expressions, and of paralinguistic

features. A human language is not a closed and homogeneous “monosystem”; it is rather a unique, complex, flexible dynamic “polysystem,” a conglomerate of languages constantly moving and overlapping internally and reaching other languages externally (Wandruszka, 1979, p. 39). As Wandruszka suggested, “already in our mother tongue we are plurilingual in all the colours of the socio-cultural spectrum. Therefore it is also difficult to say what exactly our own personal language is, what constitutes the individual use of language of each of us” (1979, p. 38, my translation). Overall, he asserted, languages are essentially *composita*, in the same way as archeological sites show different cultures and their influences, superimposed or harmoniously integrated; however, unlike archeological sites, languages are neither static nor achieved. They are dynamic and flexible, accepting of further contact with other languages, and in a continuous process of creation and modification. Typical human language learning is a constant work in progress. It is not only when children are brought up bilingually that they are exposed to (and learn) more than one language; even those who learn only one language learn several layers of that language—regional and social variations, as well as “technical” language which they will continue to expand later in life, the unique plurilingualism of each individual being a yield of his or her life journey (Wandruszka, 1979, p. 41).

Wandruszka’s perspective does not only demystify the myth of monolingualism, the false vision of linguistic homogeneity and pureness; it is also visionary from a pedagogical perspective (Christ & Hu, 2008). Particularly thought-provoking is the normality and inevitability of plurilingualism. No matter how monolingual we consider ourselves to be, we are fundamentally plurilingual, albeit unconsciously so. No matter how *standard* and *pure* we consider each language, it is inevitable that all languages are ensembles of different elements in a dynamic and constantly changing relationship.

Unfortunately, applied linguists still structure most language research around an unrealistic, idealized hearer-speaker model that is not very different from the one Chomsky envisaged. They fail to see that it is impossible to isolate single elements of languages and language acquisition in the same way that it is impossible to isolate single elements in most domains of research, a perspective which complexity and system theory is clearly proving (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, 2002; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Morin, 1984, 1990; Morin & Le Moigne, 1999). A growing body of research has investigated bilingualism (Baker, 2001; Pavlenko, 2011) and multilingualism (Auer & Wei, 2007; Martin-Jones, Blackledge, & Creese, 2012), bilingual education (Cummins, 2000, 2007; García, 2009; Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000), and multilingual pedagogies (García & Flores, 2012) underlying the

ideological and political implications of the conceptualization of languages (Duchêne & Heller, 2007; Heller, 2003; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007), and proposing new tools and lenses for rethinking bi/plurilingualism in a dynamic perspective. The concepts I mentioned earlier all stress hybridity and point toward replacing a linear, restricted vision of second or foreign language pedagogy with plurilingual pedagogies that are dynamic, recursive, complex, and nonlinear (García & Flores, 2012). Pavlenko observed that, unless we apply a multilingual lens, we will not be able to see how the real world is “messy, heteroglossic, and multilingual” (2005, p. xii). She warned against the risk of continuing to focus language-related inquiry “on the minority of the world’s population—monolingual or predominantly monolingual speakers—and [of assuming] that only when we find how ‘things work’ in monolingual speakers-listeners will we be able to extend the findings to speakers of more than one language” (Pavlenko, 2005, p. xii). I not only embrace this position but go a step further by applying Wandruszka’s (1979) message: monolingual speakers do not really exist, only unaware plurilinguals do.

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

No single methodological recipe exists, nor should exist, for dealing with such a complex notion as plurilingualism (Beacco & Byram, 2007, p. 82). Nevertheless, certain tools have been created to help practitioners deal with this new perspective and a multitude of pedagogically sound practices have been developed. In the European context, two tools are significant in the realm of plurilingualism: the *European Language Portfolio* (ELP),<sup>1</sup> and the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (AIE).<sup>2</sup> The ELP, which comes in many versions specially conceived for—and by—local contexts, helps learners record their own levels of proficiency in different languages (be it their mother tongue[s] or any additional languages acquired in either formal or informal education), describe their linguistic biography, collect evidence of their own progress, and above all engage in a process of self-reflection conducive to lifelong learning. Several ELP models integrate special sections to help learners develop a metacognitive, metalinguistic attitude and to apply it in a crosslinguistic perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> *European Language Portfolio* (ELP). Council of Europe dedicated website <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/>

<sup>2</sup> *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (AIE), Council of Europe Publishing, [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/default\\_EN.asp?](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/default_EN.asp)

The AIE is designed to encourage people to think about, and learn from, intercultural encounters that are particularly significant to them. Learners of different ages are guided to make sense of the concepts of culture and intercultural experiences when faced with diversity and otherness. The theoretical framework of the AIE<sup>3</sup> purposefully dedicates a section to plurilingualism; the AIE aims at facilitating, among other things, reflection on the role language plays in intercultural encounters and consequences of contacts with, and adjustments to, other languages, where *other* can also refer to different varieties within the same language.

Some approaches that inform practitioners about how to foster plurilingual competence include: *intercomprehension of related languages* (Degache, 2003; Meißner 2004; Meißner, Meißner, Klein & Stegmann, 2003), *tertiary language learning* (Hufeisen & Neuner, 2004),<sup>4</sup> and the *intercultural approach* (Byram, 1997; Byram & Fleming, 1998). Known together as pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures (Candelier et al., 2011), these resources are based on teaching/learning activities involving more than one variety of languages or cultures. *Intercomprehension* refers to strategic acquisition of partial competences within language families (e.g., Romance, Germanic, Slavonic); *tertiary language education* stresses the possibility of capitalizing on previously acquired languages; *awakening to languages* points toward the value of an early exposure to a range of languages, beyond the school curriculum; and the *intercultural approach* is an umbrella term for all practices where culture becomes pivotal in language acquisition.

A tool has also been produced for practitioners to implement pluralistic approaches,<sup>5</sup> providing a wealth of descriptors for guiding the teaching/learning process. In this tool descriptors are organized around three categories: *knowledge*, *attitude*, and *skills*. *Knowledge* refers to the language phenomenon considered in its complexity of linguistic and semiological systems but also as means of communication, locus of culture and identity, and in relation to other languages. *Attitude* includes aspects such as attention, sensitivity, curiosity, positive acceptance, respect, and valuing linguistic and cultural diversity. *Skills* include the ability to observe, analyze, identify, compare, learn to learn, and how to use what is known in one language to understand or communicate in another.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/Source/AIE\\_en/AIE\\_context\\_concepts\\_and\\_theories\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/Source/AIE_en/AIE_context_concepts_and_theories_en.pdf), p. 16 par. 2.13.

<sup>4</sup> Referred to by others as *language awareness*.

<sup>5</sup> CARAP-FREPA *Framework of reference for pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures*, <http://carap.ecml.at/CARAP/tabid/2332/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

Among these good practices, the *Comparons nos langues*<sup>6</sup> (Let's compare our languages) project (Auger, 2005) is worth citing. It shows a French as a second language class where young learners are constantly helped with their metalinguistic reflection by referring to their personal language(s) of origin and by comparing its grammatical and lexical features with those of the target language. The teachers involved do not speak any of the students' languages of origin. Therefore, at given times in the course, the students are the experts and a process of sharing competences takes place; a process that not only fosters French proficiency but also provides learners with enhanced senses of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and autonomy (Little, 1991).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS/LESSONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

In the European context, the idea of plurilingualism at the individual level paired with multilingualism at the societal level was first defined and explored in non-English-dominant regions (Coste, Moore, & Zarate, 2009), emerging from the Council of Europe's policy of respecting and valuing linguistic (bio)diversity, considered as cultural capital and a means of preventing the dominance of one or a few languages over others. In turn, reflection on multilingualism in English-dominant regions has mainly moved from a vision of recognizing language diversity, preserving heritage languages (and cultures), or making English speakers aware of the value of studying other languages to a more dynamic vision, open to linguistic plurality and synergies through heteroglossic perspectives and concepts.

The tenets underlying plurilingualism are important for all languages, be they mother tongue(s), additional, or international languages. A key tenet is the degree of awareness of this process, the level of autonomy with which a learner is able to recognize and foster the process of acquiring a plurilingual competence. Nothing is automatic when it comes to acquiring a plurilingual competence (Beacco & Byram, 2007) because language users must develop awareness of their own trajectories and plurality of linguistic and cultural resources as well as a recognition of their identities through reflection on their experiences (Moore & Castellotti, 2008). Conscious, reflexive learning allows for the transformation of a pluralistic repertoire into plurilingual competence (Le Pichon Vorstman, 2008).

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<sup>6</sup> *Comparons nos langues: Démarche d'apprentissage du français pour les enfants nouvellement arrivés*. Project coordinated by Nathalie Auger, Université Montpellier 3, <http://www.cndp.fr/bienlire/02-atelier/fiche.asp?id=1387&theme=1200>

Plurilingual competence is idiosyncratic, involving different personal trajectories, representations, and relationships (Coste, 2002). It is also heuristic, because its components—that is, partial competences—are both differently articulated and unbalanced and in a dynamic relationship, capable of creating links between linguistic and cultural elements, but also of adapting to situations and interlocutors.

Plurilingualism promotes awareness of language diversity, functional uses of a variety of linguistic means, recognition of similarities and differences among languages, and the link between language and culture(s) and eventually also of the specific features of each language, including the mother tongue (Piccardo, Berchoud, Cignatta, Mentz, & Pamula, 2011). For English teaching in mainstream education in North America, in which classrooms are increasingly multilingual and multicultural, there is great potential for adopting plurilingualism as the foundational philosophy. From the point of view of developing the whole learner, this philosophy means that teachers should be aware that English language learners have already gained many life experiences; possess many cognitive abilities based on their personalities, previous learning experiences and contacts, motivation and/or anxieties about learning/speaking (Hufeisen & Neuner, 2004); and, finally, have often already learned (or been exposed to) other languages or varieties of languages. Teachers can capitalize on these overarching competences, which are crosslinguistic and crosscultural, and learners can be made aware of the metalinguistic and metacognitive capital they possess, which would consequently increase their self-esteem, agency, and self-efficacy. To accomplish the latter, teachers do not need to be competent in the languages of the learners, but they certainly do need to overcome their “monolingual disposition” (Gogolin, 1994): to focus on teaching the whole person rather than merely teaching the language, thus helping learners to become autonomous, to integrate formal and informal learning, and to effectively reflect on their learning. Educators need to delegate some of the learning power to the students and to accept and explore limits of comprehension linked to the different cultural perspectives that each language bears. All forms of code-mixing and translanguaging should be seen as positive signs of progress, as the construction of proficiency. Therefore, such techniques should not be forbidden or ignored, but exploited as learning epiphanies. The same should happen with moments of metalinguistic and metacultural insight linked to linguistic structures and vocabulary. This perspective would achieve a positive backwash effect by prompting learners and teachers to become more aware of the specific features of the English language, which has structured itself from the very beginning of its history around a syncretism of diverse elements from completely different languages and cultures.

This process requires a new vision and a new form of agency on the part of TESOL professionals and English language learners; a total change of paradigm, leading to the demise of several pedagogic, cultural, and linguistic myths. Overcoming the *monolingual disposition*, so widespread especially when it comes to the teaching of such a “global” language as English, requires considerable effort. This effort is worthwhile because adopting a plurilingual lens would help both learners and teachers situate their efforts in a much wider perspective. Mastery of English would not be the sole objective, but rather one specific aim within a broader perspective of language education and personal development in the broad sense. More autonomous learners could start to see bridges and links instead of obstacles and difficulties. Both teachers and learners could “take away the sacred aura from the concept of plurilingualism itself and make it something rather ordinary and not exceptional” (Carrasco Perea & Piccardo, 2009, p. 25, my translation).

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## ***Neither “Mono” nor “Multi”: Plurilingualism and Hybrid Competence***

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■ Piccardo (2013, this issue) highlights three points that we would like to address. One is the contrast of plurilingualism with an idealized monolingualism, and, as noted by Piccardo in her discussion of Pavlenko (2005), the dangers of referencing learning multiple language varieties to a monolingual model. The second is the emerging notion of *plurilingualism*, in contrast to multilingualism, as interactive, dynamic, and taking into account multiple varieties. The third is the teaching and learning issues involved if these contrasts are ignored, along with the promising potential for pedagogical innovation when plurilingualism is recognised as a norm and a desired outcome.

This discussion is salient in contexts such as Singapore, typically described as a multilingual society with a quadrilingual education system (Silver & Bokhorst-Heng, 2013). Singapore's official language-in-education policy is premised on a variation of idealised monolingualism, on a mono/multilingual dichotomy, providing for instruction