

## **Plurilingualism, teaching and learning, and Anglophone higher education: an introduction**

### **Anglophone universities and linguistic diversity**

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In this Special Issue, we present a series of articles on plurilingual approaches to teaching and learning in two Anglophone higher educational settings, the UK and Anglophone Canada. Universities can be understood as sites of linguistic diversity in which the institutions' medium(s) of communication and instruction come into contact with the diverse linguistic repertoires of their students. Our focus is specifically on plurilingualism inspired pedagogical issues/approaches in linguistically diverse universities located in areas of the world traditionally regarded as the "Anglophone centre," for example, the United Kingdom, the United States, Anglophone Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Central to our focus is the belief that there exists a mismatch between the "myopic monolingual malaise" (Martin, 2010, p. 17), or the "monolingual disposition" (Gogolin, 1994), that inform institutional policies in linguistically and culturally diverse higher education settings. This malaise, or disposition, all too often, leads to universities framing linguistic diversity in terms of deficit: as a problem to be solved, an obstacle to communication, and an "impediment" for teaching and learning. We argue that these views are ill informed and outdated and that it is time for the Anglophone higher educational sector to develop policies and practices that are informed by "language-as-resource" (Hult & Hornberger, 2016; Ruiz, 1984). Accordingly, in this Special Issue, the authors' focus is on resource-focused ideas and approaches in relation to the teaching and learning agenda in Anglophone higher educational settings. In doing so, we put forward a view of language plurality and linguistic diversity as assets for universities, and for their staff, faculty members, students, and society. "Language-as-resource" is a broad brush that encompasses a number of theoretical

perspectives, including plurilingualism. We argue that plurilingualism is a generative lens that offers an equitable way forward for addressing the linguistic and cultural diversity that characterizes the contemporary academy in the Anglophone world.

Two key factors that have led to a rapid increase in cultural and linguistic diversity in universities in Anglophone settings are the marketization of higher education and the shift to a mass system of higher education. The marketization and mass expansion of higher education have been driven by globalization, defined as the “observable ongoing process of the increasing and ever-more intensive interconnectedness of communications, events, activities and relationships taking place at the local, national or international level (Block, 2006, p. 3).

There is an extensive body of literature in higher education studies examining the impact of globalization on the sector (e.g., Altbach 2016; Cremonini et al., 2014; Shin & Kehm, 2013) and the tying of university activity to the knowledge economy in a global marketplace. This literature differentiates between globalization as “economic, political and societal forces pushing ... greater international involvement” in the sector, and internationalization as the policies and practices enacted by universities “to cope with the global academic environment” (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 290). The emphasis on the global remit of universities frequently features in policy documents and reports. For instance, in a recent report on higher education, the Director of Universities UK International put forward a view of UK universities as “increasingly global in nature” and as institutions that fostered “extensive international networks and experience” that would be invaluable for establishing “new relationships around the world” in Brexit Britain (Universities UK International, 2017, p. 2). Such global agendas frequently translate at institutional level into policies such as “internationalizing the curriculum” that are enacted through a variety of practices, such as the production of toolkits<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> An example of a toolkit for internationalizing the curriculum promoted by the Higher Education Academy, the main organization for supporting professional development in relation to teaching and learning in UK higher education, can be found at <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/>

designed to enable staff and faculty members to put internationalization into practice through curriculum and pedagogy.

Premised on staff/faculty members and student mobility across the borders of nation states, the internationalization agenda has been one of the main drivers in the cultural and linguistic diversification of the staff-student population in Anglophone higher educational settings. Data gathered by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2018) indicate yearly rises in the number of international students<sup>2</sup>, defined as individuals “who have crossed a national or territorial border for the purpose of education and are now enrolled outside their country of origin” (UIS, 2015). Between 2000 and 2016, the numbers of international students worldwide more than doubled, rising from 2 million to nearly 5 million (IOM, 2018). Just under 50 per cent of the 5 million international students were located in Anglophone higher educational settings (Universities UK International, 2017). Universities in the USA, the UK, and Australia were the top 3 beneficiaries, taking 24.6%, 12.5% and 7.8% respectively of the world’s international students. Canada was ranked in seventh place after France, Germany, and Japan, with 3.9%. International students come from many different countries around the globe and enter the Anglophone higher educational sector with diverse linguistic repertoires that reflect their heritage, their schooling and educational journeys, and their life experiences. Their presence has had a profound impact on the linguistic ecology of universities and brought English into routine multi-/pluri-lingual interaction on campus with a diverse array of languages and dialects represented in the international student cohort.

Another key driver in the intensification of cultural and linguistic diversity to consider in Anglophone higher education is the access agenda. This agenda relates to government policies in OECD nations to widen access to higher education for

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<sup>2</sup> Also referred to as “internationally mobile students”

underrepresented groups in the domestic population (Allen *et al.*, 2005). Despite its origins in social justice, widening access has become entangled in neoliberal economic arguments in which universities are cast as playing a key role in educating the workforce for the knowledge economy (Altbach & Knight, 2007; McLean, 2006). One of the effects of this agenda has been an increase in linguistic minorities entering Anglophone higher education, particularly those from working class backgrounds. These students bring a complex array of linguistic repertoires into the sector. These reflect the cultural and linguistic heritage of the children and grandchildren of settled migrant groups, first generation migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, Indigenous peoples and those whose ancestors suffered slavery and colonization. In sum, the internationalization and access agendas have intensified linguistic diversity in Anglophone higher educational settings and contributed to more complex institutional linguistic ecologies. This is reflected in the composition of university populations comprised of heterogeneous groups of plurilingual speakers from a range of social, cultural, and educational traditions from around the globe.

How, then, have universities in Anglophone higher educational settings reacted to the increasingly complex linguistic diversity in their midst? Research (e.g. Marshall, 2010; Martin, 2010; Preece, 2009, 2010; Simpson & Cooke, 2010) points to the prevalence of “language-as-problem” (Hult & Hornberger, 2016; Ruiz, 1984) orientations in the sector. The language-as-problem orientation casts linguistic diversity as a deficit to be fixed and normalizes the idea of “one language only” and “one language at a time” (Li & Wu, 2009) in institutional policies and practices. In this regard, Kaplan and Baldauf (2008, p. 43) argue that educational institutions normally rivet their attention on the national or official language(s) with some limited attention to “one or two larger minority languages in the polity.” In the case of Anglophone higher education, this is manifested in a fixation on English in isolation from the rest of the linguistic repertoire and an atomistic approach to language support, in which the language and literacy practices of the academic community are compartmentalized and taught discretely, separated both from the

subject of study and with little or no reference to broader linguistic repertoires. This approach positions those on language support programs within deficit discourses and as in need of language remediation, thus encouraging the erasure of “multilingual capital” (Eversley et al., 2010) by rendering it worthless or a hindrance for the activities of the academy. As studies have shown, this contributes to feelings of stigmatization and marginalization within the sector. The central focus in the articles that follow, therefore, is the belief that conceptualizing language as a resource will open up institutional spaces for plurilingual approaches to teaching and learning and legitimate the position of plurilingual speakers within Anglophone higher educational institutions.

### **Plurilingualism and Anglophone higher education**

Since the publication of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001), interest in plurilingualism has grown considerably. While the comprehensive document may have become best known internationally for its criteria for competence levels ranging from A1 to C2, it also made a major contribution to ongoing debates about bi-/multi-/plurilingualism. In particular, the CEFR presented an understanding of *plurilingualism* that challenged some of the key features of traditional understandings of bilingualism that date back to the early twentieth century: that bilingualism should be characterized by native control of two languages (Bloomfield, 1933), that bilingual interactions should involve complete and meaningful utterances (Haugen, 1953), and that bilingualism should involve alternation between two or more languages (Weinreich, 1953). According to these definitions, interactions that involve two or more languages would be seen as deficient if speakers lack native speaker competence in each language, if interlocutors could not fully understand everything being said, and if speakers mixed languages rather than switching from one to the other. This sense of deficit still pervades in many Anglophone higher education institutions today in which English, specifically, academic English, is the dominant code. Students who lack so-called native speaker competence in English are frequently perceived as

having a language problem to be remediated through taking required English language courses; there is far less focus on the plurilingual and pluricultural competencies that students bring to institutions. In other words, their reliance on, or purposeful choice to use languages other than English may be interpreted through monolingual(ist) lenses that associate their plurilingualism in and around their learning as a hindrance rather than an asset (Lin, 2013; Marshall & Moore, 2013).

Four years prior to the publication of the CEFR in 2001, Daniel Coste, Danièle Moore, and Geneviève Zarate co-authored for the Council of Europe a book titled *Compétence Plurilingue et Pluriculturelle* (Coste, Moore, & Zarate, 1997), translated into English 12 years later as *Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence* (Coste, Moore, & Zarate, 2009). They defined plurilingual and pluricultural competence in the following terms:

Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social actor has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the social actor may draw. (p. 11)

Of note in the definition is the tying of plurilingual communication to intercultural interaction, the conceptualization of the plurilingual speaker as a social actor with varying degrees of competence, and the view that plurilingual competences are composite rather than separate. These key defining features of plurilingualism are described in the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) as follows.

First, in the CEFR plurilingualism is characterized by the use of multiple languages in interactions with speakers flexibly switching between languages or

dialects so that understanding takes place. The second feature of note is the hybrid nature of plurilingual speakers' languages; in other words, a plurilingual speakers' languages are not stored in separate compartments of the human brain; or as stated by Beacco and Byram (2007), plurilingualism is a single, complex competence rather than a juxtaposition of distinct competences (p. 10). Third, an important feature of this complex competence is its unevenness. Not only will speakers frequently have greater competence in one language than others, their competences will also be different in the four skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Moreover, an uneven competence may also exist between individuals' plurilingual and pluricultural competence. For example, an individual may have extensive knowledge of a culture but may lack competence in the language of a culture or community, and vice versa. Fourth, plurilingual and pluricultural competence are described as fluid, not static, changing along individuals' career paths, family histories, travel experience and other factors. The fifth key feature of note is conceptualizing the plurilingual speaker as a social agent, described in later works as a social actor (for example, Coste & Simon, 2009). The focus on agency and the social situatedness of individuals' plurilingual practices allows for recognition of both the social constraints and the more agentive opportunities that plurilingual speakers reflexively negotiate along their daily life paths. Last but not least is mediation, through which plurilingual speakers perform mediating roles to aid communication between speakers who may lack a common language, a concept later expanded by authors such as Zarate (2004), Liddicoat (2014), Piccardo (2012), and in the 2018 Companion Volume to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2018).

### **Plurilingualism and multilingualism: what's the difference?**

Many scholars who employ plurilingualism as an analytic lens in their work do so from a perspective that differentiates plurilingualism from multilingualism. The distinction between the two terms is explained in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001): "Plurilingualism differs from multilingualism, which is the knowledge of a number of languages, or the co-existence of different languages in a given society"

(p. 4). Several leading authors have referred to this distinction in their work. For example, Moore and Gajo (2009) suggest that “the focus on the individual as the locus and actor of contact has encouraged a shift of terminology from multilingualism (the study of societal contact) to plurilingualism (the study of individual’s repertoires and agency in several languages)” (p. 138). Similarly, Beacco and Byram (2007) refer to the “the distinction between plurilingualism as a speaker’s competence (being able to use more than one language) and multilingualism as the presence of languages in a given geographical area” (p. 10). Despite this stated difference, for many educators there is little difference between the two terms. In the UK context, many educators would use the term *multilingual* with reference to the very same key defining features of plurilingualism described above. Equally, in Canada, for example, the term *multilingual* may be used more commonly by Anglophone educators, and plurilingual by Francophones – to refer to the same sociolinguistic phenomena. In this sense, one term can be a mere translation of the other. As stated by Canagarajah and Liyanage (2012), “The difference between multilingualism and plurilingualism is largely theoretical. These are not different practices. The terms connote different ways of perceiving the relationship between languages in society and individual repertoire (p. 50).<sup>3</sup>

### **Plurilingual pedagogy(ies)**

Unlike much of the research and literature on multilingualism, studies focusing on plurilingualism tend to be closely related to pedagogy with a focus on raising language awareness, encouraging the use of all languages in a learner’s repertoire as resources for learning, and promoting intercultural understanding. Frequently, the focus is on the language teaching classroom; nonetheless, plurilingual pedagogy can also be applied in other educational contexts that do not focus on language teaching, but which share the goals of promoting awareness and

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<sup>3</sup> See Marshall and Moore (2018) for a discussion of where plurilingualism fits into the broader panoply of lingualisms.



acceptance of difference, the acquisition of intercultural competence, and the promotion of belonging and citizenship in Europe (Beacco & Byram, 2007). Equally, Piccardo (2013) states that plurilingualism-inspired pedagogy challenges traditional diglossic views of discrete languages in the classroom, aims to raise students' self-esteem to enhance learning, and can involve teachers who may not understand or speak the languages of the learners. While much of the research employing plurilingualism as an analytic lens has focused on language teaching contexts and elementary and secondary schooling, an emerging body of literature is focusing on plurilingualism as a lens through which teaching and learning in higher education can be viewed.

### **The special issue**

**In the first article in the Special Issue, Postgraduate students as plurilingual social actors in UK higher education, Siân Preece** problematizes myopic views of linguistic diversity in the UK higher education sector, emphasizing the need for plurilingual and language-as-resource based approaches to teaching and learning. Selected data are analyzed from an exploratory study that included MA students as partners in the analysis of how they made use of their plurilingual repertoires on campus. In her findings, Preece suggests that participants' relationship with English Medium Instruction played a key role in how they drew upon their plurilingual repertoires. Preece highlights how the plurilingual social actor offers students a dynamic, powerful and affirmative identity that is well aligned with the teaching and learning agenda in higher education. She concludes by arguing that a better understanding of this alignment will advance plurilingual pedagogies in the sector.

**In the following article, *Understanding plurilingualism and developing pedagogy: teaching in linguistically diverse classes across the disciplines at a Canadian university*, Steve Marshall** analyzes data from a one-year study of plurilingualism across the disciplines in Canadian higher education. He focuses on

five instructors' understandings of their students' plurilingual practices and on their pedagogical responses to teaching in linguistically diverse classes in the fields of Linguistics, Literature, and Applied Sciences. Marshall analyzes interview data around three themes: English as an additional language as an institutional backdrop, how instructors perceive the use of languages in their classes, and the instructors' teaching strategies. In his conclusion, Marshall suggests that instructors' perceptions and pedagogical responses are framed not only by pervasive institutional discourses that view students' plurilingualism more in terms of deficit than asset, but also by the tension between plurilingual process and monolingual product, or, students' use of languages other than English during the learning process while they are assessed in monolingual academic English.

**Next, Victoria Odeniyi and Gillian Lazar's contribution, *Valuing the multilingual repertoires of students from African migrant communities at a London university***, offers a detailed analysis of the multilingual repertoires of students who identify with London's African migrant communities. The authors present data from in-depth interviews with undergraduate students studying applied social sciences at a university in London. The participants in their study identify as speakers of English, Swahili, and other non-prestige varieties within their repertoires. Odeniyi and Lazar suggest that the scope of their participants' multilingual repertoires may pose challenges when it comes to employing plurilingual pedagogies in curriculum spaces, suggesting nonetheless that initiatives such as teacher training courses for academic staff could play an important role in raising awareness of students' hidden repertoires and of their role in the learning process.

**The focus shifts back to Canada in the next contribution, *Plurilingual pedagogies at the post-secondary level: Possibilities for intentional engagement with students' diverse linguistic repertoires***, written by **Saskia Van Viegen and Sandra Zappa-Hollman**. In their study, the authors analyze how multilingual practices and plurilingual pedagogies are enacted in two universities in Western Canada. Specifically, they focus on the make-up of plurilingual pedagogy in different disciplinary contexts and students' engagement of their linguistic

repertoires in disciplinary and learning activities. The authors conclude by highlighting the challenge faced by students and faculty members alike in creating classroom environments across the disciplines that can both open up plurilingual spaces and promote continued English language proficiency.

**The fifth and final contribution in the Special Issue, *Valuing a translingual mindset in researcher education in Anglophone higher education: supervision perspectives*, is authored by Jane Andrews and Richard Fay.** The authors explore the implications of plurilingual and translingual practices in the contexts of doctoral supervision at a UK university. Data are presented from a data set of written, self-reported profiles of doctoral researchers and their supervisors. The authors focus on how participants in the study described using their different linguistic resources for different research purposes. In concluding, Andrews and Fay argue that researcher education should foreground language more than is currently evident in some Anglophone higher education contexts, and that the theoretical lenses of translingualism and plurilingualism offer useful frames for such practice to be carried out.

**The Special Issue concludes with a thought-provoking discussant piece written by Canada Research Chair in Plurilingual and Intercultural Education, Angel Lin.** In her discussant piece, Lin continues the discussion of plurilingual approaches to teaching and learning in Anglophone universities first by revisiting the notion of “Anglophone” settings in the broader contexts of BANA settings (Britain, Australasia, North America). Lin goes on to challenge what she sees as persistently reified and naturalized binaries in both institutional policies and the beliefs of some participants in such settings. Lin closes by suggesting possible ways to use a heteroglossic, plurilingual lens to move beyond “either-or” binaries, which some teachers and students may perceive as natural, necessary, unquestionable, or unchangeable.

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