

Teaching and Learning in Multilingual Contexts

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Teaching and Learning in Multilingual Contexts

Sociolinguistic and Educational Perspectives

Edited by
**Agnieszka Otwinowska and
Gessica De Angelis**

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Introduction

Towards Education for Multilingualism

Agnieszka Otwinowska and
Gessica De Angelis

Recognising the multilingual nature of societies and the multilingualism of individual citizens as commonplace is a long and challenging process. The social, political and economic differences between regions of the world make comprehensive solutions hard to propose and to implement across the board. In most Western societies, including European countries, policy makers emphasise the need to develop individual multilingualism and recognise a growing need to teach multilingual students more effectively within mainstream education. In countries and regions that are linguistically more homogeneous, educators are mostly concerned with the teaching of foreign and minority languages. The situation is different in the countries that deal with multilingualism in society and in the school context, where teaching largely depends on local histories and needs. Here the variation of practice often results from a trial-and-error approach to teaching students and training teachers who are either bi/multilingual or live in bi/multilingual environments. Sometimes, it seems that educators are reinventing the wheel every time they implement strategies for bi/multilingualism within the school contexts. A closer look at local realities, however, shows a number of common themes and practices, shared aims and preoccupations, and often similar solutions.

The present volume was conceived with the intention to capture how such shared aims and concerns are dealt with and resolved in different contexts with respect to teachers and students in mainstream education. An essential feature of the volume is therefore its broad geographical representation. We included chapters that represent research conducted in various countries where multilingualism is present in the school contexts. These countries are Canada, Poland, Spain, Croatia, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and Austria. Our objective is to show what learning and teaching in

multilingual contexts involve and how teachers and students are gradually moving from a monolingual to a multilingual conception of society and education. The volume, however, does not aspire to present a holistic view of education around the world, so it may be disappointing to those readers who are seeking global recipes for fostering individual multilingualism and for teaching in multilingual settings. Instead, the chapters point to problems and solutions that are defined by particular sociolinguistic contexts. The importance of the issues discussed lies in the fact that they may be extended to similar contexts in other countries. The volume is unique because it introduces a strong element of conceptual matters that deserve to be taken into account in the practical application. It also draws attention to how these conceptual aspects of defining multilingualism are ‘translated’ into social contexts and into working with multilingual individuals of varied language biographies.

The theoretical debates concerning the status of multiple languages acquired point to the need for conceptualising multiple language acquisition alternatively to the traditional L1, L2, L3 model. Attention is drawn to the fundamental distinction between native languages and non-native languages, which helps to better grasp and understand the nature of multilingualism. The chapters of the volume present the issues of multilingual education through the prism of all the five types of social settings where L2/L3–Ln is acquired (extended to multilingual contexts from Siegel, 2003). The *dominant L2/L3 setting* (often called the majority language context) means that the language acquired is the dominant language of the majority of population and is used in all domains of everyday life. The people learning/using the majority language are predominantly immigrants, for instance as in the case of Africans in Germany (Chapter 6). Here, education may result in subtractive bi/multilingualism, that is the attrition of the native language competence, mostly for social reasons and due to the negative attitudes towards the minority languages. The *minority L2 setting* is when the speakers of the dominant language learn the minority language, which is rare and usually happens in naturalistic rather than classroom context (e.g. Poles learning Kashubian, or Lithuanian, Chapter 2). A very special case described in the volume is that of speakers of heritage languages, whose competences in their native language are very limited, relative to their competence in the majority language. This is the case of Hungarians in Austria (Chapter 11), whose knowledge of German is much better than of Hungarian, but they make a conscious decision to study their home/heritage language.

In the three settings described below, learning and acquiring languages usually results in additive bi/multilingualism, if attitudes and motivation for learning are positive. In the *external setting*, the speakers of a language dominant in the region are learning a foreign language, or a lingua franca (e.g. Swiss students learning French in Switzerland, Chapter 9, or Croats learning English and German in Croatia, Chapter 10). The *coexisting L2 settings* are

multilingual environments where users of languages are of similar status and the languages are used in similar domains (e.g. Italian and German in South Tyrol, Chapter 8, or English and French in Canada, Chapter 3). The last type is the *institutional L2 setting* (sometimes called the official language context), when L2 is widely used in some domains and institutions, but for most of the population it is the additional language (e.g. Spanish in Catalonia, Chapter 4). Each of these settings triggers different problems to individual multilingual learners/users and to the institutionalised education.

The reader will find that the questions asked in different sociolinguistic settings are often strikingly similar, which uncovers an underlying shift in thinking on how we conceptualise multilingualism in education. At the societal level, several chapters discuss individual multilingualism in relation to language policy development and identify a general need to adopt a plurilingual approach to educational policies (Chapters 2, 4 and 9). At the individual level, we see a general trend to have students and teachers reflect on who they are, and what multilingualism means to them. Authors ask how teachers view themselves as bi/multilinguals, how they find their own space and dimension in a multilingual society and educational context (Chapters 3 and 8) and what affects their views about language learning (Chapters 9 and 5). Questions related to finding one's space and dimension in a multilingual context are also asked to students and about students: how they see themselves (Chapter 6) and what affects their learning progress (Chapter 7, 10 and 11). A multilingual identity search seems to be present in all of the contexts represented in this volume.

Multilingualism is widely perceived to be a positive phenomenon. Indeed, there is evidence that having knowledge of two or more languages positively affects cognitive development (Adescope *et al.*, 2010; Bialystok, 1987, 2001, 2011; Bialystok *et al.*, 2004) and the process of acquiring additional languages (Cenoz, 2001, 2003; Cenoz & Hoffmann, 2003; Cenoz & Valencia, 1994; De Angelis & Jessner, 2012; Lasagabaster, 2000; Sanz, 2000). In the volume, some chapters discuss the general expectation that multilingualism in school equals positive results (Chapters 7 and 9). Sanchez, in particular, discusses how parents expect children in CLIL programmes to succeed, as if teaching for multilingualism automatically meant success. She then provides interesting evidence on the age factor, suggesting that multiple language learning may turn into an asset only after a certain age is reached. We are also aware that in the school context immigrants, who are often bi/multilingual, do not perform as well as their monolingual peers (Miller & Warren, 2011). How do we then reconcile positive and negative expectations and outcomes of multilingualism in the school context? It is clear to most of us that individual and societal multilingualism cannot be dealt with uniformly.

We must be prepared to move away from a monolingual to a multilingual conceptualisation of language knowledge, language policy and individual multilingualism, and this is precisely what is happening in the educational

contexts discussed in the various contributions to this volume. The linguistic plurality and diversity that one finds in all of the countries examined stand in strong opposition to the one country–one language policy, which used to be promoted in the Western civilisation for over two centuries (Hornberger, 2002; Mesthrie, 2010). Thanks to the introduction of the Bologna Process in the education field and the European language policy devised by the Council of Europe, the European Union has focused on promoting individual multilingualism (Council of Europe, 2001; European Commission, 2005) and inter-comprehension (Council of Europe, 2007; Doyé, 2005; European Commission, 2005, 2007). Two key competences for lifelong learning involve communication in the mother tongue, which is the ability to interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative manner in a full range of societal and cultural contexts (express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form), as well as communication in foreign languages, which also involves mediation and intercultural understanding. What is emphasised is the development of partial competences, which denotes a limited ability of some kind within a given language, as well as transversal competences: transferable knowledge or skills across languages which may be used for varied purposes (Council of Europe, 2001). One of the essential aims of multilingual education is the development of plurilingual competence through ‘a manner of teaching, not necessarily restricted to language teaching, which aims to raise awareness of each individual’s language repertoire, to emphasise its worth and to extend this repertoire by teaching lesser used or unfamiliar languages’ (Council of Europe, 2007: 116). Idealistic picture aside, the Council of Europe admits that even in rich European societies a significant number of people, including children and young people in formal education, have only a limited command of the language of the region or country where they reside. At the same time, young multilingual people who have two or even three first languages, are not necessarily fully literate in both or all of them. This is due to the fact that apart from the official EU languages, several hundred languages are spoken and used across Europe, including other official European languages, regional languages and non-European languages, often referred to as migrant languages (Mackiewicz, 2011). If these interact with the five social settings defined above, the educational puzzle to solve becomes rather complex.

Canada shares a similar situation due to the massive migrations to the country that took place in the past and which continues, although to a much lesser extent, to the present day. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act, which was passed in 1988, made Canada ‘the first country to adopt an official multiculturalism policy, reaffirming multiculturalism as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian Society’ (Kiernan, 2011: 18). In addition to being an officially bilingual nation, Canada went through substantial demographic changes within a few decades and the number of people who do not speak either official language in the home has grown as a result. It is estimated that

in areas like Toronto and Vancouver, about 40% of the population now comprises foreign-born immigrants (Duff, 2007). Multilingualism is certainly a tangible and visible reality in schools and society at large and this is why we included a discussion about policy development in Canada in this volume. It exemplifies the identity issues that Canada has been dealing with through its language and education policies, as well as the experience of multilingual individuals with mixed linguistic identities.

It is worth remembering that education does not take place in a vacuum, but in a well-specified linguistic landscape marking the relative power and status of the linguistic communities inhabiting the territory (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Admittedly, the language most widely spoken and taught across Europe and the rest of the world is English. Thus, a lot of language education means teaching English. No matter how much has been said about the dominant role of English and linguistic imperialism (cf. Byram & Feng, 2004; Cummins & Davison, 2007; Phillipson, 1992, 2007), the primacy of English has numerous consequences for the users of the less widely spoken languages. Breidbach (2003) addresses the delicate question of the role of English within a framework of multilingualism, with reference to participation in various public *fori*. Whereas at the national level proficiency and literacy in the national and minority languages do suffice, at the international level it is English that is the predominant means of communication and comprehension. It is the linguistic means to give speakers, especially speakers of lesser-used languages, their voice within public discourse; thus, individual multilingualism should entail very good knowledge of English. This remains in accordance with Aronin and Singleton (2012), who see contemporary multilingualism in terms of Dominant Language Constellations rather than individual languages known to the speaker.

We view multilingualism as both a societal and individual phenomenon (Aronin, 2006; Aronin & Hufeisen, 2009) and these two aspects underlie the volume organisation. The first section relates to the sociolinguistics of multilingualism and education. The goal of the chapters is to explore the issues associated with terminology, linguistic landscapes, teacher beliefs, identity formation, immigration and attitudes. The second section focuses on the learning process and students and teachers in the multilingual classroom. The section explores CLIL teaching and issues associated with raising language awareness and metalinguistic awareness in multilingual learners. It also draws attention to the methods of enhancing the effectiveness of teaching in multilingual settings. The entire collection of chapters makes use of qualitative as well as quantitative approaches to the study of multilingualism in education ranging from questionnaires to semi-structured interviews, focus groups, e-mail exchanges, observations, picture-story telling tasks, analysis of official documents and language competence tests.

The volume opens with the present Introduction. The first part, which focuses on conceptual and sociolinguistic issues, begins with Chapter 1 by