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Reflections on language learning and social practice for language minority students

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1. Introduction

The articles in this volume examine the experiences of language minority students from a number of different perspectives and each highlights different dimensions of the experiences of such students in schools and society. Collectively, they reveal the complexities and multidimensionality of language minority students' lived experiences of languages. In reviewing this collection of articles, two constructs emerge as significant for understanding the language learning and social practice of minority language speakers in and out of schooling, although these two constructs are not explicitly referenced in most of the articles. The first construct involves the way that multilingualism is understood and points to the significance of a distinction between multilingualism and plurilingualism that is often made in European scholarship (Moore & Gajo, 2009). The second construct is the monolingual habitus (Gogolin, 1994, 1997, 2009) of schools and societies and the ways that this habitus impacts on people's language learning and language use.

The terms *multilingualism* and *plurilingualism* have often been treated as (close) synonyms in English-language research traditions, with multilingualism being the preferred term to describe the presence of more than one language at both the societal and the individual level (Piccardo, 2019). In European scholarship (e.g., Asensio, 2021; Escoubas-Benveniste, 2009; Moore & Gajo, 2009; Negri, 2019; Piccardo, 2019), multilingualism and plurilingualism are distinguished as fundamentally different concepts, and this distinction can provide important insights for understanding how multiple languages are present and used in different contexts. In this usage, *multilingualism* refers to a context in which more than one language is present, such as a society or a school, while *plurilingualism* refers to the level of the individual and the use of multiple languages in communication (Moore & Gajo, 2009; Piccardo, 2019). Plurilingualism is understood as a complex and dynamic form of linguistic practice that transcends language boundaries to establish complex repertoires of communicative abilities and practices drawn from multiple languages. As practised use of multiple languages, plurilingualism thus often resembles ideas around translanguaging (Garcia & Li Wei, 2014; Li Wei, 2018) in that it emphasises the development and use of complex linguistic repertoires. Making a distinction between the terms multilingualism and plurilingualism allows us to recognise that a particular context may be multilingual in the sense that many languages are present in the context, but not plurilingual, in that those languages present are not drawn on (Piccardo, 2019). This means that it is possible to distinguish between contexts that are multilingual in character, but monolingual in practice; that is where many languages are present but only one language is used, and contexts that are multilingual in character and plurilingual in practice; that is, all the languages present in the repertoires of the participants can be drawn to achieve the social or educational goals of the context. Many of the articles in this issue reflect tensions in the ways that multilingualism and plurilingualism are experienced by linguistic minority members in educational and social contexts.

Understanding and use of languages are shaped by linguistic habitus; that is dispositions about languages and their use that generate and organise linguistic behaviours (Gogolin, 2009). Gogolin (1994, 1997) argues that in many societies there is a prevailing monolingual habitus; that is an entrenched belief that monolingualism is the normal and normative linguistic state of human beings and that communication takes place in a single language. The monolingual habitus leads to assumptions of linguistic homogeneity as the normal state of existence and the normal context in which communication occurs. In this way the monolingual habitus restricts language use to a monolingual paradigm. Even where multiple languages are in focus, such as in language classrooms, a monolingual habitus can apply. In such contexts, although the focus may be expanding students' linguistic repertoires, the monolingual habitus can restrict language use to a specific named language and treat hybrid language practices as deviant and/or as reflecting some deficit in language knowledge. Multilingualism and plurilingualism can be seen as relating closely to the idea of linguistic habitus. In contexts that are multilingual but in which one language only is used in practice, there is an interaction between the presence of multiple languages and the monolingual habitus that occludes the presence of these multiple languages as a relevant dimension of context and reinforces the normative use of a single language. At best, the other languages that are present are considered as 'background' that has an influencing effect, usually a negative one (e.g., Creagh, 2016), on the use of the single language, but is otherwise not relevant for understanding language use, language users, or practices of teaching and learning. In contexts that are plurilingual, a multilingual habitus (Benson, 2013) shapes the ways that languages and their use are understood and practiced and thus treat the whole of people's language repertoires as relevant.

Linguistic habitus is also associated with ideas about legitimate language use, with a monolingual habitus not only creating contexts in which the use of a single language is normative but also shaping understandings of the single language as the sole legitimate language variety to be used in such contexts (Bourdieu, 2001). One result of this is to establish hierarchies of value (Liddicoat, 2018a) associated with particular languages, with some languages conveying high prestige and legitimacy, or cultural capital, and others conveying less based on their perceived usefulness and desirability within the context. Language habitus are in this way ideological constructs (Vann, 2011) and that construct the meanings and languages and their use have in particular contexts.

These constructs provide a useful heuristic for understanding the present collection of articles. They all showcase facets of plurilingual individuals but highlight variations in how their plurilingualism is developed or enacted. These differences reveal the ways that linguistic habitus, and the ideologies associated with it, construct multilingual realities in ways that either encourage or constraint plurilingual practices.

2. Linguistic minority students' linguistic realities

The presence of linguistic minorities results from a range of different processes, but they all result in multiple languages coming to be co-present in specific spaces. The presence of linguistic minorities may arise as a consequence of migration processes (Masso and De Costa, 2023) or more temporary mobilities such as study abroad (Han, Lin, and Wen, 2023). They may also be present because of processes of colonisation and political expansion (Wang, 2023). They may also be the result of technologies that bring languages into new virtual spaces, or

make distant languages present in local spaces (Fang and Huang, 2023; Teng and Mizumoto, 2023). The papers in this issue provide cogent reminders that the linguistic contexts that result from such mobilities are not neutral but rather are shaped by ideological constructions of language(s) and the perceived hierarchies of value that result from them. It is not simply the new social context that is a constructed linguistic and social reality; the home context from which people move also is constructed in complex ways that can interact with, conflict with, or reinforce aspects of the ideological construction of the new language context. For example, Masso and De Costa (2023) show that Maji moves from Burundi, in which a hierarchy is constructed in educational contexts that positions French as the hierarchically dominant language and constructs monolingual practice as an educational norm, to the USA in which French is ousted from its dominant position in the linguistic hierarchy by English, but the monolingual framing of education continues. Such instances point to the disruptions and continuities that exist in mobility across places and languages and the importance of taking these into consideration.

Masso and De Costa's study reveals that members of linguistic minorities live in multilingual spaces in which they draw on elements of the linguistic repertoires to achieve social and communicative purposes but also experience their plurilingualism in different ways in different contexts. However, they may simultaneously inhabit multilingual spaces, such as schools, where their plurilingualism is devalued and may even be experienced as detrimental because of the monolingual framing of these spaces. Maji, for example, is unable to make use of services that are provided for him because he does not have the English required to gain information about these. In this way, his wider repertoire becomes irrelevant for negotiating his access and participation in the monolingual space of the school and there is little sense that schools recognise the need for multilingualism within their own contexts or for addressing basic needs of those who do not yet speak the language of schooling. It is thus only through chance, informal contacts that Maji is able to draw on his wider repertoire to access the information he needs to access the services that are available to him. Moreover, Maji is discouraged from further developing his own plurilingual repertoire when he is told by his school that it is not necessary for him to learn Spanish as he already speaks Swahili. This constructs language learning as being necessary only to fulfil institutional criteria rather than as opportunities to develop repertoires that can open new possibilities for participation. For example, for Maji living in a predominantly Hispanic area of the USA and the use of Spanish could open new ways of engaging with his local community. The conflict here between Maji's multilingual context and the advice he is given about developing his own plurilingual repertoire can be seen as an enactment of a monolingual habitus in education that values the acquisition of the dominant language but marginalizes the role or importance of other languages, and of plurilingualism, for the individual or for the society. He thus needs to find for himself spaces in which his plurilingualism can provide resources for negotiating his situation and address his needs as institutions shaped by a monolingual habitus do not provide such opportunities.

While Masso and De Costa's study reveals ideologies of plurilingualism that appear to constrain the space for plurilingual development, Joo, Chik, and Djonov's (2023) study reveals that in other contexts, plurilingualism can be viewed as a positive dimension for linguistic minorities. Joo et al. reveal that immigrant Korean parents view plurilingualism as opening up possibilities for global citizenship and participation in wider social and economic structures. They therefore argue for heritage language maintenance as part of a preparation to live and work in an international context and see plurilingualism as an enhanced repertoire that allows for engagement in local and extra-local spaces. These parents would appear to have a more

multilingual habitus that sees a linguistic repertoire drawn from multiple sources as contributing to the cultural capital of the individual in the globalized linguistic marketplace. However, this view is not shared by their children who see their languages more in terms of affiliation to the various communities in which they participate and as a source of identity in their local contexts. This difference reveals much about the ways that various identity possibilities are played out in educational contexts. The parents' focus on global citizenship, although paralleled in educational policy, may be in conflict with the ways that educational spaces respond to migrant presences. While education policy often focuses on preparing students to work at the global level, there remains a fundamental tension within educational systems between the local and the global. A key role of schooling is to socialise children into the national culture, and into a particular form of that national culture (Cowen, 1996). The school is thus a place where one learns to become a citizen of a nation. For immigrant children, this socialisation role is potentially conflictual as they have identities that are derived *from there* (the nation of their heritage) and *from here* (the nation in which they are living). During the process of assimilating into the national education system and culture, the identity acquired from one's country of origin can potentially hinder the full integration into the host country as a citizen. This perspective reflects conflicting narratives regarding language affiliation, which are perceived as evidence of immigrants having divided loyalties (Bosniak, 2008; Kunst, Thomsen, & Dovidio, 2019; Lightman, 2018). It may be the case that global citizenship is valued more for those whose national affiliation is assured and unproblematic than for those whose national affiliation is less clear cut (Osler, 2011). Joo et al. 's children who talk about language as enabling affiliation to different groups appear to be negotiating the complexities of belonging in their various communities and trying to integrate these identities, and do not seem to think in terms of the transcendent dimension that global citizenship represents.

Fang and Huang (2023) examine the plurilingualism of minority language students in a context in which the dominant language, and a monolingual habitus associated with it, are exerting pressure of the maintenance of a local minority language. They examine the place of translanguaging by Teochew speakers in China and reveal the existence of translanguaging as a productive and significant way of using language(s) across a range of contexts including home, school, and the wider world. At the same time, they observe the impact of Mandarin Chinese on younger speakers and the pressure to shift from Teochew that such speakers experience. The study reveals the complexities of the relationship between dominant and minority languages in any language ecology and evidences the ways that a monolingual habitus impacts on language use. The monolingual habitus, because it emphasises the norm of use of one language only, constructs the acquisition of a dominant language primarily in adversarial ways; the addition of one language presupposes the removal of another, or at least, the irrelevance of the other once the majority language has been acquired. The addition of a dominant language is not usually understood as expanding the learners' language repertoires, although this is inherently what happens when a new language is acquired, but instead as a movement from one language to another, with dominant-language abilities being seen as the desirable outcome. Schools, in particular, may take on the role of replacing languages rather than building expanded linguistic repertoires. Fang and Huang (2023) trace the plurilingual realities that result from the addition of the dominant language, but also observe the ways that a monolingual habitus impacts on language ideologies and perceptions of the value and worth of the other languages in speakers' repertoires positioning them as having lesser relevance, utility and/or prestige and thus undermining their legitimacy.

Wang's (2023) paper is a reminder that the inclusion of a language in an educational space is not simply a linguistic phenomenon but also links to the ways that the meanings and knowledges created in and through the language are included or excluded. In multilingual educational spaces, participants have access not only to a variety of languages but also to worldviews and knowledge associated with these knowledges. Where a monolingual habitus shapes educational practice, it not only excludes languages but also the epistemologies associated with them, valorising knowledge made and communicated in the single language of schooling and marginalising knowledge created in and communicated through other languages (de Sousa Santos, 2007; Liddicoat, 2018b). Wang examines the integration of indigenous Māori epistemologies in the teaching of Chinese in New Zealand. Foreign language classrooms have often been perceived as spaces for the target language and that other aspects of students' lives tend to be given only marginal positions in the classroom. This too is a reflection of a monolingual habitus with a focus on a single language as the curriculum norm. Wang's paper is an important reminder that foreign language classrooms are points of contact, not points of exclusion, and that the languages and cultures of the local context have a place which is both inevitable and legitimate in such classroom contexts. It also points to the complexities of the world outside the classroom and how processes of colonialisation and decolonisation are played out both outside the foreign language classroom and within it. It is important that language teachers address, and are equipped to address, such complexities in non-trivial ways in their language teaching. Wang's paper also invites reflection of how diverse epistemologies are included (or not) in educational contexts. The prevailing monolingual habitus of schooling has the potential to exclude all epistemologies outside the dominant one from classrooms and to marginalise students' (and even teachers') knowledges and lived experiences. In the New Zealand context, it is only because the government has ratified the inclusion of Māori epistemologies in the classroom that space has been opened for them in the practice of many schools, and, as Wang reports, has legitimated the practice of those teachers who have sought to integrate elements of their learners' languages and cultures. However, the inclusion of diverse epistemologies is not only relevant when it is supported by the government, as such government support is typically limited in its scope; for example, New Zealand mandates the inclusion of Māori epistemologies, but is silent of the epistemologies of other linguistic and cultural groups within New Zealand. What is important is the inclusion of all learners' languages, cultures, epistemologies, and life worlds in education as the alternative is their marginalisation in both education and society.

The majority of papers in this issue focus on the ways that languages are treated in specific spaces. However, in the contemporary globalised world, virtual spaces also create contexts in which language learning and use are played out.

Han, Lin, and Wen show the ways that social networking sites (SNS) influence the ways in which students engage with home and host cultures in the study abroad context of Chinese students studying in Portugal. The study examines how these students engage their plurilingualism in different spaces and how technologies open or constrain ways of using languages. This study reveals the ways that technologies allow a lamination of spaces in contemporary contexts of mobility, a bringing together of here and there, and creating new multilingual realities by bringing together different languages through the lamination of physical and virtual spaces. They also examine the consequences of this lamination for participation in diversity. SNSs enable students to participate in their home linguistic, cultural, and social contexts and also afford possibilities for engagement with the contexts of the community in which they are living. They note that SNSs can thus provide both affordances

for participation in the local community and can also obviate the need to engage locally when the home context is available virtually. The lamination of place can function in different ways for students, some of which are supportive for engagement with diverse other and some of which may restrict how much engagement there may be. The home context can provide a place of safety for those who are dealing with experiences of otherness, but such places of safety can also limit how much students engage with the other in sites of intercultural contact. SNS can also provide points of engagement with diversity and open possibilities for other forms of engagement. The study reveals the importance of recognising that in contemporary contexts issues of place in educational settings are much more complex than the physical spaces in which learners find themselves and that spaces can be manipulated through technology in ways that can. Reflections on language learning and social practice for language minority students [7] allow learners to construct their own sense of place and the connections they have across places.

Teng and Mizumoto (2023) also address the place of technology and the ways that technologies open spaces for language learning. They argue that captioned television can support vocabulary development by providing minority language learners with access to multimodal input that can support their incidental language learning. They indicate that the technological resources available to minority language speakers create complex, multi-layered worlds in which they can develop their linguistic repertoires and engage in plurilingual practices.

3. Concluding comments

The articles in this issue approach the educational and social contexts of minority language speakers from a range of different perspectives. Some are narrowly focused on educational contexts, some on broader societal contexts, and others spanning the two. These point to the complexities of the multilingual worlds of minority language speakers and the ways that the contemporary era of globalisation creates affordances and constraints for their development of plurilingual repertoires. They also reveal that, while the globalised world means that all spaces are multilingual, whether these are physical spaces, virtual spaces, or laminated spaces created by the interaction of physical and virtual spaces, the ways that multilingualism plays out in practice are complex and nuanced.

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