
Title	Subject English in bilingual and multilingual settings: Embracing the linguistic Other
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Source	<i>English Teaching: Practice and Critique</i> , 8(2), 1-5
Published by	The University of Waikato

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Editorial: Subject English in bilingual and multilingual settings: Embracing the linguistic Other

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INTRODUCTION

More and more classrooms today are linguistic contact zones. They are discourse spaces where the language that is the focus of instruction – in this case, English – co-exists with other languages imported in the minds of the students. Too often, even if the teacher is aware of them, these other languages are kept publicly silent.

For this issue, we called for articles that document classrooms where that co-existence is not only acknowledged but also actualized in the public academic space, and where the interaction between English and one or more student languages not only affirms students' bi- or multi-lingual identities but also enhances their understanding of curriculum content.

The eight topical articles and one teacher narrative that appear here come from schools in three countries: Brunei, South Africa and the United States. In Brunei and South Africa, English is numerically a minority language but assuming increasing importance for political and economic reasons, with increasing complexity and tensions in language policy and practices. In the US, English has been the politically dominant language of the majority, but is now being challenged because of increasing immigration – especially from Spanish-speaking countries – and immigrants' increasing political power. The “Articles in Dialogue” section of the next issue of ETPC will add a ninth article from New Zealand, where the language contact zone involves the language of the indigenous Maori.

From the perspective of the academic field of Language Planning and Policy (LPP), the discourse practices documented here represent conflicts not only at the macro level of governmental policy, but at the school and classroom level of actual language practices. In one metaphor, we have to “unpeel the [LPP] onion” to reveal the inner reality of language life at the classroom level (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996).

Together, this issue's contributors show how teachers work in policy environments that are always complex and may be adverse to the best interests of student learning. When teachers follow the policy mandates of *English only*, learning may be curtailed as students are unable to draw on what they already know and on the resources of their peers, while other teachers find ways to allow students to use their full linguistic repertoires. These diverse affordances for learning are mediated by the nature of language education policies, by teachers' capacity for what Saxena calls “constructive

resistance” to dominant language ideologies, and by their strategies for productive use of multiple languages as resources for learning.

The affordances may be *intentionally structured and designed* to facilitate learning at different scales. For example, Rutherford and colleagues carefully create extended workshops to facilitate student understandings of both languages and poetic forms. Rodriguez and colleagues’ out-of-school cooperative bi-literacy program engages students, parents and teachers in a sustained “cooperative of reading” that allows for a safe, encouraging space for learning new languages. The Dual Proficiency program described by Hayes, Rueda and Chilton uses vertical teams of teachers from K-4 levels to create coherent, content-based curriculum and pedagogy that draws on students’ linguistic heritage and life experiences. Ferreira presents a university undergraduate course that creates a multilingual pedagogic space where linguistic diversity is respected and students are able to explore their linguistic and cultural identities. Heugh’s article highlights attempts by a South African school principal to bring bilingual practices into the school through incorporating multilingual mediums of instruction as well as activities that allow students to have access to other languages. Finally, Martin-Beltran’s description of a dual-immersion bilingual school shows the rich interactions and learning that can occur when languages are brought together into the classroom. Such structured innovations that acknowledge and draw on linguistic diversity require strong support and leadership from schools, including professional development that seeks to build teacher capacity to use multiple linguistic resources, support from the students’ families and communities, and sustained commitment for equitable access to academic learning for the students.

In contexts where language education policies legitimise one particular language over others, opportunities for the co-existence of multiple languages in the classroom become limited. Nevertheless, teachers may resist state mandates and cultural norms to create affordances for learning in *emergent but just as productive* ways. Saxena in Brunei shows how a classroom teacher was able to resist the government’s insistence on “English-only” use in classrooms and in the process, construct a safe, linguistically rich, space for teacher and students to learn. Similarly, Goldberg’s article highlights how a teacher cultivated a non-threatening environment that allows students to use multiple languages to learn science. Finally, Makoe and McKinney describe how a particular student mobilised her linguistic resources and hybrid discursive practices to create multiple identity positions that gave her and her peers new learning opportunities. From all these articles, we see how these affordances – structured or emergent – can benefit students in multiple ways.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Goldberg and colleagues report on the ways in which Spanish was positioned in a Grade 6 science classroom. Drawing on Lemke’s (1990) insights about “talking science” and Vygotsky’s sociocultural-historical approach to learning, they demonstrate how one teacher simultaneously made legitimate students’ use of Spanish and an inquiry approach to science. They show how being able to speak in Spanish allowed the students to organise themselves for complex scientific explorations as they worked together in groups. Importantly, the teacher modelled moving between languages in her own talk about ideas and processes, but did not draw attention to

code-switching; rather she attended to the content of students' contributions, and kept the focus of interaction on science.

Also working in a Californian predominantly Spanish-speaking community, Martin-Beltran argues that when students explicitly focus on language choices they gain new conceptual and metalinguistic understandings. Predominantly English-speaking and predominantly Spanish-speaking bilingual Grade 5 students worked together to jointly compose texts in English and Spanish. Tasks carefully designed to be accomplished by peers with different linguistic resources afforded students serious opportunities to "co-construct their language expertise" through a reciprocal and iterative process she describes metaphorically as the "language boomerang".

At the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, culturally diverse, first-year students are invited by their instructors, Ferreira and Mendelowitz, to read and write language biographies as part of a sociolinguistics course. After reading the language biographies of published authors, students were asked to write a detailed account of their own language biography, and they were invited to code-switch as desired. Through analysing the language narratives of three students, Ferreira and Mendelowitz explore students' movements across different spaces and times and the impact of various oppressive and limited contact zones on their identities, demonstrating powerfully how the politics of language use can produce deficit student identities.

Also in Johannesburg, but in a Grade 1 classroom of 45 learners with diverse language repertoires, Makoe and McKinney document the case of 7-year-old Tumi as she takes on the role of translator, language broker and "sub-teacher" and mediates classroom social and literacy events for her peers, attending especially to the needs of her friend, Lerato. The authors show the complex work that Tumi does in helping the teacher and her peers orchestrate successful routines and learning episodes. Importantly Tumi moves between a sophisticated use of English and knowledge of local languages, Setswana and Sepedi, to intervene strategically in the classroom so that the teachers' goals and those of her peers can be accomplished.

In the context of conflicting signals about the pace of South African multilingual language policy implementation, Heugh provides an account of a bilingual history and geography program with 8th grade students, that was undertaken by the principal of one South African school. She shows how, at the start of the implementation, students strongly preferred English as the medium of instruction. Yet, when bilingual practices were used, students realised that drawing on and accommodating their own linguistic resources allowed for educational scaffolding of their own learning. The subsequent repositioning of their preferences of academic language marks a disruption of the hegemony of English as the conduit for learning.

In "Poetry Inside Out", Rutherford describes workshops that engage elementary and middle-school students in the Bay Area in California in the challenging practices of reading and writing poetry, and translating from one language to another. Four principles drive the workshops: students are exposed to great poems in their original (Spanish) language; they are encouraged to use imagination as an essential tool; and they come to realise that practice in writing and translating is essential. Finally, the knowledge gained in these workshops is applied through a cycle of writing,

translating, publishing and performing. The authors provide examples of translated poems to show how the workshops ultimately help students to build a “meta-awareness of not only what they are learning, but how”.

Rodriguez presents a teacher-initiated project conducted in an elementary school in South Los Angeles, USA, where two teachers worked with 29 4th grade students and their families to develop “cooperatives of reading”. For the majority of these students, immersion in four years of English-only language programs had not resulted in significant improvement in their English proficiency, and at home, many parents lacked enough knowledge of English to be able to help. Recognising the importance of reading as communal practice, the teachers embarked on an after-school initiative that involved students and parents together in dialogic and critical reading practices. Moreover, these cooperatives result in a strong sense of community that sustained participation and commitment to the program.

In Southern California, Hayes, Rueda and Chilton describe a Dual Proficiency program that aims to scaffold academic understanding of both academic English and Spanish. Through carefully designed curriculum and instruction that emphasises linguistic connections between students’ languages, as well as drawing in indigenous languages from Mexico and Central America familiar to their families, the program facilitates English and Spanish language acquisition while accommodating state content standards. The authors conclude by pointing to the complexities and challenges involved in initiating and sustaining the program, ending with a call to shift the focus of bilingual education from the language of instruction, to the quality of instruction.

In his ethnographic research in high-school English classrooms in Brunei, Saxena considers how teachers make use of home language legitimate in the classroom or, alternatively, what students do when their “other” language(s) are excluded from official classroom discourse. Noting the contradictions inherent in Brunei’s policy environment with its competing ideologies of Malaya nationalism and increasing prestige of English, he contrasts the practices of two English teachers as they orchestrate student talk around text. Saxena’s article points to the contingent nature of the language referred to in the subtitle of this issue: Which language is, in the reality of each and every classroom, “the linguistic other”?

Finally, in an article in dialogue, Chih-Min Shih reports on an investigation into the washback effects of the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT) on English teaching in two applied foreign language departments in Taiwan, one of which prescribed its GEPT requirement to its day-division students while the other did not. The investigation showed, somewhat surprisingly, that the GEPT did not induce a high level of washback on teaching in either department. Only courses which were linked to the departmental GEPT policy and whose objectives were to prepare students for the test were significantly affected, with findings suggesting that micro-level contextual factors (for example, the objectives of the course) and teacher factors had a greater impact on teachers’ instruction.

Not included in these articles is the unusual story of lost opportunities in Singapore, the home country of issue co-editor Kwek. Since the 1960’s, English has been the medium of instruction in Singapore schools. At the same time, a bilingual policy was

instituted that requires all students to learn English and a “mother tongue” language – Chinese, Malay or Tamil depending on one’s ethnicity. To enforce these language policy mandates, the periodic, high-stakes examinations assess “mother tongue” achievement along with English and math. Meantime, children are increasingly using a language at home (English) that is markedly different from their parents’ (predominantly Chinese, Malay or an Indian language). Adding to the language mix are the increased influx of foreign students into Singapore schools – unofficial numbers of students from the Peoples’ Republic of China alone indicate 30,000 students with their accompanying “study mothers” (“Mum’s the Word”, 2004) – drawn by the availability of an education in English.

The result is a linguistic landscape in schools that has become complex and challenging for language and content teachers alike (Education Minister Ng Eng Hen, 2009). Yet, despite this multi-lingual environment, bilingual language education policy requires English and mother-tongue language teaching to be conducted in silos – in effect, parallel monolingual teaching. Linguistic contact zones between languages are shunned except in unofficial, non-curricular talk or out-of-school contexts. (For a detailed case study of one Singaporean high-school student’s multi-lingual as well as multi-modal, out-of-school life, see Bokhorst-Heng & Wolf, 2009.) Implicit in this policy and practice may be the fear that encouraging contact zones of bilingual learning will create bilinguals who lack competence in either language (Sommer, 2004, p. 13). Ultimately, by not embracing either “linguistic other” in official school space and time, teachers are ignoring and marginalising the rich linguistic resources that students bring into the classroom.

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