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Socially just plurilingual education in Europe: shifting subjectivities and practices through research and action

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ABSTRACT

The articles in this special issue explore approaches to research and action in language education that have the potential to transform subjectivities and practices in relation to linguistic diversity. They seek ways within education and teacher education to overcome what Gogolin ([1994]. *Der monolinguale 'habitus' der multilingualen Schule*. Waxmann Verlag) called the 'mononlingual habitus', i.e. the deep-seated habit of assuming monolingualism as the norm for all individuals and thus for schooling. In doing so, the contributors aim to (re)inscribe multi/plurilingual education in Europe as a socially engaged pedagogical approach and field of research grounded in ideals of social justice. In this introduction, we provide a brief overview of multi/plurilingual education in Europe, linking to current critical work on neoliberalism, language, education and social justice. We then introduce and discuss some of the key theoretical concepts used by the different authors for studying subjectivities (e.g. attitudes, beliefs, ideologies, mind-sets) as well as the methodological approaches employed in the articles. We close with an overview of the different articles that make up the special issue and by highlighting some of the enduring issues in the field of multi/plurilingual education.

1. Introduction

This special issue explores approaches to research and action in language education that have the potential to transform individual subjectivities and pedagogical practices in relation to linguistic diversity. In doing so, the contributors aim to (re)inscribe multi/plurilingual education in Europe as a socially engaged pedagogical approach and field of research grounded in ideals of social justice. The contributions represent local realities in Austria, Catalonia (Spain), Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the UK, and focus on different educational levels and actors, but unite around a common concern with educational equity for linguistically diverse students. They

seek ways to overcome what Gogolin (1994) called the 'mononlingual habitus', i.e. the deep-seated habit of assuming monolingualism as the norm for all individuals and for schooling, as a result of socialisation including through teachers' education and training, working environment and social encounters. This issue reveals that the argument that she formed back 1994 is still highly relevant despite decades of efforts on behalf of different stakeholders – researchers and practitioners among them – to dissociate monolingualism from 'the norm'; to complexify the 'discreteness' of different named languages; to disentangle 'language' from other constructs such as 'nation' or 'ethnicity'; to advocate for multi/plurilingualism as a resource in education; and to dismantle linguistic hierarchies, amongst other projects (see, Lüdi & Py, 2009 for a review.

The sociolinguistic complexity that is experienced at present across Europe and the globe is well documented (Appadurai, 1996; Creese & Blackledge, 2018; Castells, 1996; Duarte & Gogolin, 2013; Extra, 2013). This complexity includes 'historical' or 'autochthonous' linguistic diversities, those resulting from recent demographic mobility and migration, and transformations in the ways we communicate as a result of digital technologies (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Vertovec, 2007). In different areas of Europe, as well as official forms of multi/plurilingualism (i.e. institutional and/or curricular languages), hundreds of other languages are spoken as a result of the globalisation of capital, economic migration, tourism and student mobility, among other movements.)European educational institutions, and the community more generally, face the enormous challenge of valuing and developing students' full language competences to allow equal participation in education and in the inter-connected and ever-changing world beyond school. Teachers in the twenty-first century need to be capable of educating creatively, critically and in socially just ways in complex interactional environments (Hawkins, 2011; Schleicher, 2012), in order to take advantage of the diverse communicative repertoires.

In this introduction we continue with an overview of multi/plurilingual education in Europe, linking to current critical work on neoliberalism, language, education and social justice. We then discuss some of the key theoretical and methodological approaches used by the different authors for studying subjectivities. We close with an overview of the articles that make up the special issue and by highlighting some of the enduring issues in the field of multi/plurilingual education.

2. Multi/plurilingual education in Europe, neoliberalism and social justice

Various publications in recent years (e.g. García & Otheguy, 2020; Lau & Van Viegen, 2020; Vallejo & Dooly, 2020) discuss the similarities and divergences in how the notions of multi/plurilingualism emerged and have been used in political and scholarly work in Europe and beyond. These authors – amongst others – point out important historical differences in how the terms emerged and are used in different geographical contexts and disciplines. Often, European institutional discourses (e.g. Council of Europe, 2001) distinguish between multilingualism -- defined as the presence in society and in schools of more than one language – and plurilingualism – to refer to individuals' knowledge and use of languages. Despite these differences, researchers in Europe – including the different authors featured in this special issue – can be found using both or either of these terms, often interchangeably. Multilingualism and plurilingualism are employed by scholars from different theoretical and methodological backgrounds to refer to linguistically

diverse social contexts, to the full communicative repertoires and competences of individuals, and to educational strategies fostering different languages in schools. Furthermore, as Vallejo and Dooly (2020) explain, Europe institutional discourses often frame the promotion of multi/plurilingualism within broader political projects of supporting European cohesion, maintaining European cultural heritage, promoting citizens' mobility and boosting Europe's economic development and competitiveness. Meanwhile, many researchers of multi/plurilingualism in Europe take a critical view, setting out from the concerns of minoritised speakers in Europe and placing social and educational equity at the forefront of their work (García & Otheguy, 2020). Many scholars in this field also align their research on multilingual practice with theories of translanguaging as explored in the work of scholars such as (García & Wei, 2013; Moore et al., 2020), and this phenomenon is further explored and put forward as having transformative potential in the studies featured in this special issue.

Different authors have warned of the neoliberal underpinnings of certain European political discourses about multi/plurilingualism and education (Flores, 2013; Flores & Rosa, 2015). Del Percio and Flubacher (2017) consider language and education to be crucial tools for the implementation of neoliberal agendas. An example is the neoliberal rationales put forward for the implementation of educational reforms that favour competitiveness, profitability and efficiency. In order to train desirable workers suited to a globalised world, standardised curricula, assessment and learning objectives have been implemented to produce workers that meet the demands of constantly changing workplaces that require mobility, flexibility and diversification of professional skills (Heller & Duchêne, 2016). Language is regarded in terms of expertise and professionalism and is important for workers' distinction and competitiveness, as well as capital – for individuals, companies, nations – that can be bought (e.g. by individuals taking language courses) and sold. This links to discourses of linguistic instrumentalism (Kubota, 2011), which emphasise the importance of learning particular languages and varieties of them for individual successes as learners and workers, as well as discourses of linguistic governmentality (Martín Rojo & Del Percio, 2020), which value sustained enterprises of self-improvement, including surveillance of one's own language use, and autonomy in processes of language learning, among others. Flores (2013) offers a critical review of the emergence and circulation of the European ideal of plurilingualism in particular institutional discourses and policies as a reminder of the need to question 'how plurilingualism may unwittingly be used as a tool of neoliberal governance that reinforces rather than challenges current relations of power' (p. 509). He asserts that there is the risk that 'plurilingualism will become a new, institutionalised form of colonisation as mobile plurilingual elites take advantage of the commodification of language to position themselves as ideal neoliberal subjects', thereby producing 'a new elite class of English-speaking plurilingual subjects who have mastered several codes and participate in fluid linguistic practices solely at the service of neoliberal expansion' (p. 516). Indeed, Climent-Ferrando (2016) argues that the European Union only highlights the importance of linguistic diversity and multiplicity of languages rhetorically, while adopting market-oriented approaches aiming at economic growth, mobility and jobs and therefore policies promoting multi/plurilingualism embrace neoliberalism.

While acknowledging the omnipresence of these discourses, the contributors to this special issue seek to offer possibilities beyond them by explicitly advocating social

justice in and beyond educational institutions (Hawkins, 2011; Piller, 2016). They argue that to foster educational equity, schools should accommodate the different paths leading to individual multi/plurilingualism, as well as integrate the linguistic resources students and teachers bring with them as resources for learning (Duarte, 2019; García & Kleyn, 2016; Llompart et al., 2020; Melo–Pfeifer, 2018; Vetter, 2012). Multi/plurilingual pedagogies entail languages being used flexibly in education, so that students can benefit from content learning across languages as well as improve their competence in all of their languages (Lau & Van Viegen, 2020). The idea is to maximise learners' abilities to draw on the wide range of linguistic resources that they have developed both in- and outside of school for learning in school. Such pedagogies have proven to be powerful in developing confidence and legitimising students' identities, promoting language and metalinguistic awareness, supporting the learning of the target language without necessarily disrupting students' abilities in other languages and enhancing cognition (Conteh & Meier, 2014; Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2018; García & Wei, 2013; Jessner, 2008; Meier, 2018). As Kirsch and Aleksić remind us in their contribution, however, multi/plurilingual pedagogies need to be responsibly and reflexively planned, with an awareness of dominant discourses, as their uncritical implementation has been found to have the potential of reinforcing linguistic hierarchies (Hamman, 2018; Jaspers, 2018; Weber, 2014).

Contributors to this special volume also point out that a means of confronting neoliberal discourses in language education involves acknowledging and critically examining the role of 'global' and dominant languages such as English in the social and political crises of our time (cf. Erling, 2017). In doing so, they seek to respond to the fact that even when multi/plurilingualism is promoted in policy goals, languages are given different symbolic values and the specific linguistic repertoire developed through schooling is often valued over resources from paths of migration (Hélot & Young, 2005; Piller, 2016). Similar to West (2019), they question their 'moral selves' as professionals, as they are simultaneously critical of, yet through their work implicitly align to, certain tenets of neoliberalism. This volume thus shows how researchers and their collaborators work to build 'moral', or what they consider to be socially just and contextually appropriate, approaches to language education. Such approaches can help practitioners create pockets of resistance and community that can lead to social activism despite the temptation to give into a sense of futility when faced with powerful hegemonies.

3. Researching subjectivities to transform educational practices

Multi/plurilingualism has long been promoted in European policy and research findings have regularly confirmed the benefits of knowing and using more than one language, particularly for additional language learning (Bialystok, 2007; De Angelis, 2007; Jessner, 2008). Despite this, researchers have found that while stakeholders in education may be welcoming of multi/plurilingualism in theory, positive ideas about linguistic diversity are not consistently upheld when it is met in the classroom (Bonnet & Siemund, 2018). In Europe and beyond, low educational achievement is commonly associated with students' diverse linguistic repertoires, particularly when they are from low-income and/or migration backgrounds (García & Kleyn, 2016; Hall & Cunningham, 2020; Walker et al., 2004; Young, 2014). Thus studies have turned their focus to subjectivities – the attitudes,

beliefs and ideologies of teachers and other stakeholders in education – towards linguistic diversity and multi/plurilingual practices. These subjectivities are important because they have been found to impact teachers' pedagogical practices and students' learning, as well as their motivation and self-concept, and thus can play a role in the perpetuation of disadvantage (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2010).

Negative beliefs about school linguistic diversity have been found to be common amongst teachers (Bredthauer & Engfer, 2016; Haukås, 2016; Heyder & Schädlich, 2014; Lundberg, 2018; Portolés & Martí, 2018). While teachers may perceive diversity of languages positively in general, it has been found to be perceived as a hindrance in direct association with language learning and classroom interactions (De Angelis, 2011) and not necessarily used as a resource for teaching (Heyder & Schädlich, 2014). Studies suggest that teachers may be resistant to implementing multi/plurilingual approaches for a number of reasons, including not feeling prepared (Llompart & Birello, 2020); viewing the approaches as impractical; having a lack of resources; and fearing that they will disadvantage language majority students (Meier, 2018). Teachers might also have negative attitudes towards multi/plurilingual practice and a concern that it will result in confusion and interference (Fallas Escobar & Dillard-Paltrineri, 2015). However, the more well-informed the teachers are about linguistic diversity and language learning, the more likely they are to opt for a more pluralistic way of teaching (Aronin & Jessner, 2015; Lundberg, 2018). Moreover, the studies here suggest that the more teachers are aware of their beliefs, the more likely it is that they will reflect and act, challenging their moral selves to constantly resist deficit discourses and practices to provide their students with differentiated support and aim towards educational equity.

Contributors to this special issue draw on this work and also focus on people's subjectivities or understandings of language in education, their implications and how they can be transformed. While there is much overlap between the approaches taken, the authors employ different theoretical concepts – attitudes, beliefs, ideologies – and different methodological approaches. The means of investigation include questionnaires and surveys for quantitative analyses, discourse analysis of focus group discussions and multimodal analysis of drawings.

Dekker et al. focus on attitudes – defined as socially and culturally embedded metalinguistic conceptualisations of language and use (Blommaert, 2006; Dragojevic et al., 2013). The researchers use measures to gauge both implicit and explicit attitudes in order to counter possible contradictions and trace variables contributing to these. In this case, the focus is on how primary school pupils feel about migrant and minority languages in their schooling. Beliefs are the focus for Erling et al. – the complex cluster of intuitive, subjective knowledge about the nature of language, language use and language learning, considering cognitive, emotional and social dimensions, as well as cultural assumptions (Barcelos, 2003; Pajares, 1992). Both explicit but also implicit beliefs are considered as phenomena that can predict behaviours – with implicit beliefs being the more spontaneous and less reflected beliefs that we hold, which wemay also be less inclined to admit to. Explorations of pre-service and in-service teachers' linguistic and educational biographies also feature in the contributions, and possible implications for their beliefs and mind-sets (as Melo-Pfeifer refers to them), as well as for their current or future educational practices are explored. Kirsch and Aleksić and Birello et al. take a more discursive approach and focus on ideologies and dominant language hierarchies – the abstract and

often implicit belief systems about language that are perpetuated by discourses and practices in education. It has been argued that such ideologies 'will inevitably influence the language policies which [teachers] adopt at school and consequently impact on children's learning' (Young, 2014, pp. 157–158). Following in this vein, some of the authors study the declared practices of teachers working in linguistically diverse schools in order to uncover underlying beliefs or ideologies in relation to multi/plurilingual education (e.g. Erling et al., Kirsch and Aleksić). Others study beliefs and ideologies about pre-service teachers' multi/plurilingualism and linguistic diversity in schools as they emerge in interaction (e.g. Birello et al. and Melo-Pfeifer). Dekker et al. focus on the attitudes of students.

What the contributions have in common is a concern with meta-reflection, with how people verbalise or represent their ideas about their own and other's linguistic repertoires and/or linguistic diversity in schools and/or educational practices. All contributions also consider opportunities for challenging language ideologies and transforming negative perspectives about diverse repertoires – particularly with regard to their potential for learning – and educational practices, with a focus on pre- and in-service teacher professional development initiatives. The authors frame their research in terms of the responsibility shared by researchers, school teachers and teacher educators to enhance equity and work to minimise gaps in education that arise in part due to practices and structures informed by monolingual mindsets, standard language ideologies and deficit beliefs about linguistic diversity and multi/plurilingual practice. Some of the studies featured in the special issue are part of larger national or European-funded projects which include action research and/or research activism in their designs to not only illuminate people's understandings of linguistic diversity in education but also to contribute to transforming these subjectivities and educational practices. In the following section we present an overview of these different contributions.

4. Overview of the contributions

The issue starts with a contribution from Kirsch and Aleksić, who explore the challenges of implementing multilingual pedagogies that support the development of literacy in several languages in early childhood education in Luxembourg, particularly in terms of challenging dominant language ideologies. Drawing on findings from a questionnaire study about the language use in daily communication and literacy activities of educators and parents in day care centres, the authors describe the use of multiple languages in the regular language exchanges at the centres. Although the programme is multilingual, it is the dominant languages in this context that are prioritised while migration home languages were marginalised, therefore reproducing language hierarchies and dominant ideologies. The authors thus make recommendations for teacher education to help educators become more aware of their values and language ideologies, reflect on these, and develop a multilingual stance. They also recommend collaboration with parents as part of the key to success.

Dekker, Duarte and Loerts investigate primary school pupils' explicit and implicit language attitudes in the highly diverse primary education situation of Fryslân, the Netherlands, wherein pupils' home languages are used as a resource to promote multilingualism and thereby facilitate learning. Employing an innovative use of implicit association tests with the under-researched population of primary school children, they find that

children had more positive attitudes about the prevalent majority languages of Dutch, English and Frisian when compared to minority and migrant languages. They thus suggest that in implementing multilingual education approaches, primary school children's attitudes must be explicitly addressed.

Erling, Foltz and Wiener compare beliefs about multilingualism amongst English language teachers in twotypes of secondary school in the Austrian education system, where early tracking continues to dominate despite evidence demonstrating that it results in educational inequities, particularly for students from migration backgrounds and/or with German as an additional language, and for students with low socio-economic status. The study investigates teachers in both school types with regard to their beliefs about students' motivations and abilities in English language learning, finding that differences between teachers in the two school types may be contributing to gaps in achievement in English language education, which also enhances broader social inequalities. The authors close by considering how plurilingual pedagogies might be employed to transform beliefs and practices and to minimise disadvantages.

Birello, Llompart-Esbert and Moore analyse beliefs about plurilingualism and teaching in diverse classrooms of pre-service teachers in Catalonia, Spain. They find that while pre-service teachers have very positive ideas regarding plurilingualism –especially regarding being plurilingual speakers – their feelings about linguistic diversity in schools become negative when positioning themselves as teachers. The authors conclude that pre-service teachers' discourses are influenced by hegemonic European institutional ideologies about multi/plurilingualism and neoliberal conceptions of languages and language learners. They thus argue that more spaces for discussion, reflection and transformation of beliefs are needed in pre-service teacher education to promote linguistically sensitive teaching among future practitioners.

Melo-Pfeifer presents a study using visual methods in teacher education. She presents and compares the linguistic biographies of future French and Spanish teachers, focusing on the constitution of the plurilingual repertoire and the representations of becoming plurilingual. Her multimodal analysis reveals the pervasiveness of the monolingual mind-set in foreign language education, and the need of the promotion of such tools to challenge dominant language learning ideologies.

Finally, Meier and Wood present the theoretically-informed Multilingual Socialisation (M-SOC) tool and discuss its potential for transforming teachers' beliefs, making multilingual practices visible and providing educators with practical ideas for implementing multilingual approaches. This article closes the special issue with important insights for how teachers and teacher education initiatives can proactively and explicitly engage with perceptions about languages and multilingualism so that innovations are sustainable and the ground is more fertile for change.

5. Enduring questions and opportunities for further action

We end this introductory piece with a reflection on the ongoing need for research and action in the area of multi/plurilingual education, at a time when many parts of Europe and the world are experiencing a second or third wave in the COVID-19 pandemic that has altered lives, interactions and education systems since early 2020. Socio-economic gaps are getting larger, not smaller. The disenfranchised are becoming even more

disadvantaged. Those students whose education was most negatively affected during periods of home-based learning as a result of COVID-19 are those who are already highly disadvantaged in the education system: students with low socio-economic status and those with emergent competence in the language(s) of instruction (Gerszon et al., 2020). Added to this public health, social and educational crisis, populist platforms promoting nationalist and isolationist ideals prevail across the continent, though there is substantial resistance to this across contexts as well. We fear that such tendencies will mean that, despite growing diversity, monolingual mindsets will continue to prevail and possibilities for transformative action will be mediated by political and social constraints – perhaps more so than ever. The role of multi/plurilingual education research and teacher education in promoting reflexivity, inclusivity and criticality thus plays an increasingly important role. On a more hopeful note, increasing diversity also makes it more possible and likely that students from diverse linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds – despite the adversities they may experience in their school systems – might enter the field of education as teachers and teacher educators, bringing the wealth of their experience and their varying repertoires with them. We believe that the contributions in the special issue – and the collective action that they all suggest – can play an important role in the sustained implementation of multi/plurilingual pedagogies that support linguistic diversity and social justice across Europe and beyond.

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