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Pluralism in Language Education – Concepts and Didactic Implications

Pluralizm w edukacji językowej – konceptualizacje, implikacje dydaktyczne

KEY WORDS	ABSTRACT
language v. languanging, pluralistic approaches, mediation	The article is a metalinguistic reflection on the didactic potential of *plurilingualism*, and its aim is to present the conceptual assumptions of selected pluralistic concepts of language education, which linguists call *plurilingual pedagogies*. This is a group of methodological, theoretical and practical approaches, considered not only innovative, valuable and effective, but also necessary for application in contemporary education. And although plurilingualism functions in the Polish system in bilingual and international institutions, in the form of didactic concepts, programmes or methodological solutions, the author sees the need for its wider use and implementation in everyday school practice, especially in the present times, when every child is in the process of reaching a certain level of bilingualism and every teacher is a teacher of language. This article presents the most important concepts, such as *prulilingualism*, *translanguaging* and *language awareness*, which are used in the everyday language practice of multilingual families and communities and are applicable in multilingual groups, classrooms, and in working with children with migration experience.

SŁOWA KLUCZE | ABSTRAKT

language
v. *languaging*,
podejścia
pluralistyczne,
mediacja

Artykuł ma charakter metajęzykowej refleksji na temat potencjału dydaktycznego plurilingwalizmu, a jego celem jest prezentacja założeń koncepcyjnych wybranych pluralistycznych koncepcji edukacji językowej, które lingwiści określają mianem *plurilingual pedagogies*. To grupa podejść metodologiczno-teoretycznych i praktycznych, uznawanych nie tylko za innowacyjne, wartościowe i skuteczne, ale też niezbędne we współczesnej edukacji. I chociaż różnojęzyczność funkcjonuje w polskim systemie w placówkach dwujęzycznych i międzynarodowych w formie koncepcji dydaktycznych, programów lub rozwiązań metodycznych, autorka dostrzega potrzebę jej szerszego wykorzystania w codziennej praktyce szkolnej w obecnych czasach, gdy każde dziecko jest w procesie dochodzenia do określonego poziomu dwujęzyczności, a każdy nauczyciel jest nauczycielem języka. W artykule przedstawiono najważniejsze podejścia: *prulilingualism*, *translanguaging* i *language awareness*, które są stosowane w codziennej praktyce językowej rodzin i społeczności wielojęzycznych oraz mają zastosowanie w różnojęzycznych grupach, klasach, w pracy z dziećmi z doświadczeniem migracji.

Introduction

Questions about how to support children's linguistic development and how to organize language education in times of increased global interactions, multiculturalism, multilingualism, and migration across and within national borders are discussed among university researchers and practitioners alike. Early childhood classrooms in the 21st century have become highly heterogeneous and are attended by children with different abilities, language experiences, sociocultural backgrounds, and parental expectations, which challenges teachers and educational policymakers to understand the essence of the developmental processes by which children learn two (or more) languages and the ways in which these experiences affect the development of all language skills (speaking, reading, and writing). The concept of cross-linguistic transfer – the use of both conceptual and phonological linguistic knowledge from one's first language to learn an additional language – is the subject of research and discussion by psycholinguists around the world (Galloway & Lesaux, 2017). Some researchers advocate adopting a pluri-literacies perspective, i.e., taking into account plurilingualism in the development of literacy curricula (Cross et al., 2022). Jim Cummins argues that the dialogue between theory, research, and teaching practice contributes to a better understanding of both language learning and learners' cognitive development. The knowledge about the nature of language acquisition and methods of developing language skills that educators

have gained in their teaching practice has acted as a catalyst for the creation and expansion of theory (2020, p. 206). Inspiring proposals come from the field of plurilingual pedagogy, a sub-discipline that combines theoretical concepts and didactic and methodological experiences developed in many European (Switzerland, Spain, France, and the UK) and non-European (Australia and Canada) countries.

Plurilingual pedagogies (Lau & Van Viegen, 2020) are not a completely new theory. Teaching Polish as a foreign or second language to children with migration experience is a thriving area of research in Poland. Scholars often link it to the concept of inclusive education (Gębal, 2019, p. 323). There is a real need for closer cooperation between researchers and practitioners in the field of teaching native and foreign languages (Awramiuk & Karolchuk, 2016; Awramiuk & Rozumko, 2018). Researchers have found that simultaneously learning a native, foreign, or second language changes the role and purpose of teaching grammar, basic proficiency skills (speaking, reading, and writing) and affects the teacher's approach (Pamuła-Behrens & Szymańska, 2018). In improving learners' skills, it is important to raise their awareness across all the languages they speak. Teachers can refer not only to their first language, but just as well teach by analogy with other languages with which the students are familiar, thus using their cumulative language experience. Michał Paradowski (2017, pp. 129–173) demonstrates that we should honor students' mother tongue in linguistically homogeneous classes and recognize the role of the first (source) language, which becomes a medium of instruction – a tool for achieving the organizational and logistical goals of classes and facilitating peer communication, the basis of interlingual comparisons. The first language becomes useful in comparative-contrastive teaching, which Paradowski designed. In a culturally and linguistically diverse classroom, we must think about language education in a holistic way, one that integrates paradigms, didactic concepts, approaches,[1] and guidelines for teaching the mother tongue with methodologies of teaching foreign language(s) (Krasuska-Betiuk, 2022).

Holistic trends in language education – plurilingualism and plurilingual pedagogy

The concept of plurilingualism is the cornerstone of the new paradigm in language education and its theory. It has emerged in response to increased social mobility, which has led to greater cultural and linguistic diversity and more complex learning

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[1]   The term "approach" reflects a new, open way of perceiving the planning and implementation of the teaching process. It emphasizes a formula geared toward specific educational goals and includes a fairly open concept of teaching, taking into account the use of various techniques that correspond to previously diagnosed educational needs (Gębal, 2019 p. 121).

and teaching contexts. It emphasizes interconnectedness, interdependence and a vision of synergy, as well as provides a conceptual framework for language education, which has followed a path from bilingualism through multilingualism to plurilingualism in recent decades. The paradigm shifts from a linear view of language development to a complex one that captures the dynamic interaction between language as an entity and language as a constantly evolving construct, between *language* (language as a carrier of information, existing as thought) and *languaging* (action in the making), which is a dynamic, endless process of making meaning using various linguistic and semiotic resources. *Languaging* is a phase of chaos, while *language* is a moment of transitional equilibrium, of systemic homeostasis. We can quote Vygotsky, who said that "Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them" and it "undergoes many changes as it turns into speech" (qtd. in Piccardo, 2019, p. 215). Plurilingualism is an umbrella term, one that is the most capacious semantically. According to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2020), the CEFR is not theorized only in abstract terms, but it also provides a framework for language pedagogy. The CEFR reinforces the idea that language education should adapt to different situations, thus respecting the given reality, its historical and social context, and the learners' personal goals, while honoring the cognitive, psycholinguistic, and emotional foundations of learning.

Plurilingualism unlocks three areas of innovation in language pedagogy:

1. It encourages contextually appropriate, congruent, and pedagogically focused use of linguistic and extra-linguistic resources in different languages. In this way, learners' linguistic repertoires are valued and metalinguistic awareness is formed and strengthened.
2. It assigns a fundamental role to mediation, which is both an individual and social cognitive-developmental process of meaning-making. It involves all participants in social life: student and teacher.

In mediation, the user/learner acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes across modalities (e.g. from spoken to signed or vice versa, in cross-modal communication) and sometimes from one language to another (cross-linguistic mediation). The focus is on the role of language in processes like creating the space and conditions for communicating and/or learning, collaborating to construct new meaning, encouraging others to construct or understand new meaning, and passing on new information in an appropriate form. The context can be social, pedagogic, cultural, linguistic or professional. (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 90)

Mediation can be intra- or interlingual, and all text mediation descriptors require the combined use of reception and production activities. Generally, four types of

mediation are described: linguistic, cultural, social, and pedagogical. Scholars also refer to relational mediation, or activities involving the creation of an environment that is open to cooperation, and cognitive mediation, which entails facilitating access to knowledge or concepts that a person does not have direct access to due to cultural or linguistic barriers or to being unfamiliar with the issue (Janowska, 2021, p. 73). Mediation plays a fundamental role and develops the habit of lifelong learning among both students and teachers. Incorporating different languages in the process of cognitive development supports meaning-making. By allowing students, when necessary, to rely on their (shared) language (or their L1, or mother tongue) to complete a task in the target language, we strengthen and facilitate the mediation process. The current mediation descriptors in the CEFR *Companion Volume* are divided into three main categories: text mediation (social participants/language users activate plurilingual competence to find ways to understand a text for themselves and/or others), concept mediation (they reflect together on the essence of things, which helps to articulate thoughts and conceptualize ideas), and mediation of communication among themselves (which is relational in nature, and refers to the [self-]regulation of the subject and their relationship with other social actors); the mediator assists the communication process by providing adequate space, helping to identify common ground, and anticipating and/or overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers or obstacles, as well as resolving misunderstandings and tensions (Piccardo, 2022, p. 28).

3) It promotes the action-oriented approach that the CEFR advocates and (re) conceptualizes language learning and use in terms of problem-solving. The CEFR views language learners as social actors engaged in a strategic and reflective process in which they use the full variety of linguistic and non-linguistic resources of their linguistic and cultural repertoire. The key to the cycle of planning-execution-evaluation-improvement-change in real-world action-oriented tasks is a spiral process-product-process pattern that is consistent with the systemic vision (Piccardo, 2019, p. 217).

Published in a series called Educational Linguistics, the multi-author volume *Plurilingual Pedagogies: Critical and Creative Endeavors for Equitable Language in Education*, which was edited by Canadian researchers Sunny Man Chu Lau and Saskia Van Viegen (2020), outlines the ontological, epistemological, and methodological premises for new approaches in the field of applied linguistics, summarizes current trends in multilingualism research, and established or emerging theoretical positions and constructs within pluralistic approaches to language education that are gaining the most ground (*Plurilingual lab*, n.d.). The authors of chapters centered around concepts such as plurilingualism, plurilingual pedagogies, the multilingual turn, and translanguaging promote those language theories, concepts, and pedagogical approaches that are openly critical or reformatory of the pedagogy of rectifying gaps and deficits in students' language practices. Instead, plurilingualism places emphasis

on linguistic repertoires and plurilingual linguistic competence, language synthesis (combination), code-switching, and multiculturalism. Pluralist approaches have emerged from research conducted by university linguists in collaboration with teachers working in culturally and linguistically diverse educational contexts in response to the needs of students. They take into account and develop a student's entire linguistic repertoire, including incomplete or partial language skills. When a school's didactic culture becomes open to the mother tongues of all its students (and parents) and encourages translanguaging, this destabilizes or rejects power relations based on coercion or symbolic violence at work in schools and in a given society that marginalize the intellectual potential and the linguistic talents of individual students and their communities. In line with the idea that students' identities or identifications are neither fixed nor static, plurilingual pedagogy embraces a dynamic, fluid understanding not only of language use, but also of the language learner(s) (Lau and Van Viegen, 2020, p. 327).

New methods and approaches to language learning have emerged from the pluralistic approaches proposed in the *Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches* (FREPA), which was published in the mid-2000s by the Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages. Pluralistic approaches are based on the idea that the teaching and learning process should include multiple languages (plurilingualism) and cultures (pluriculturalism), regardless of the subject. They reinforce the view that prior linguistic and cultural knowledge is welcome in any learning environment, particularly in language education. Plurilingual approaches presuppose that different teaching practices should work together and be compared with one another. Four main areas of multilingual didactics are currently being developed within the plurilingual framework: an intercultural approach to language teaching, integrated language education, intercomprehension between related languages, and an openness to languages known as Awakening to Languages (AtL) or Éveil *aux Langues* in France and Switzerland and *Sprach(en)bewusstheit* in German-speaking countries (Gębal, 2019, p. 237). Nathalie Auger (2020) proposed her own *Modèle holistique maximaliste pour les classes multilingues*, which is a comprehensive strategy for multilingual classrooms. It consists of 7 steps: 1) recognize and appreciate the linguistic diversity of the classroom; 2) use languages as a resource to be taught and learned; 3) use multilingual and multicultural materials; 4) encourage students' mutual learning from each other; 5) use multilingual and multicultural environments (outside the classroom or school) as an educational resource; 6) involve parents; and 7) raise awareness of multilingualism among educational staff and teachers of all subjects.

Translanguaging in an educational context

The term translanguaging has emerged as a descriptive label for a particular linguistic practice. It is Colin Baker's (2001) English translation of the Welsh *trasieithu*, coined by Price Williams of Bangor University in 1994 to describe teaching practices that he observed in Welsh schools, where the teacher attempted to teach in Welsh and the students responded mostly in English (Lewis et al., 2012). Sometimes the choice of language was reversed, with students reading something in Welsh and the teacher offering explanations in English. In this way, the full linguistic repertoire of the students could be used in the classroom, thereby making optimal use of the linguistic resources of the student and teacher in the process of creating meaning, shaping experiences, solving problems, and constructing knowledge. Such practices were by no means unique; in addition to Wales, they were also employed in the Basque Country or Catalonia.

The concept of translanguaging, adopted and popularized in the United States by Ofelia García (2009), has a global scope today: it means "the use of a speaker's entire linguistic repertoire without regard for the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and typically national and state) languages" (Otheguy et al., 2015). Much of this epistemology derives from Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concept of heteroglossia. Translingual language ideologies, which function as translanguaging, the multilingual turn, and plurilingualism, are the broadest areas of research (Diao & Trentman, 2021). They are predicated on the idea that linguistic boundaries are fluid and socially constructed and place emphasis on the linguistic repertoire of individuals rather than the social boundaries of autonomous, nationally and culturally defined, hegemonic, named languages. An individual's overall linguistic stock changes with time and life experiences, and people tap into their linguistic repertoire in contextually salient ways, also for learning, which may or may not correspond to the boundaries of national languages.

Translanguaging theory, on the other hand, is being developed as a theory and practice in bilingual and indigenous/inherited educational settings; it is associated with a strong orientation toward social justice, as it advocates recognizing and appreciating the languages of marginalized populations rather than adopting a deficit perspective (García & Wei, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2015). Professor Jasone Cenoz, representing Research Methods in Education at the University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU and president of the Education Science Committee of the Spanish Research Council (AEI), distinguishes between pedagogical translanguaging (a theory and practice that encompasses teaching strategies for integrating two or more languages, building on learners' content and linguistic knowledge, and expanding their metalinguistic awareness) and spontaneous translanguaging (actual discursive

practices used by multilingual learners in and out of school) and conceives of them as a continuum (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). The findings of a study of teachers who were trained to implement translanguaging practices in their classrooms are interesting (Cenoz et al., 2022).

Over the years, translanguaging has functioned as an effective pedagogical practice in various educational contexts where the language of schooling/instruction differed from the languages of the students. By deliberately breaking down artificial and ideological divides between native and immigrant, majority and minority, and target language and mother tongue, translanguaging empowers both student and teacher, and transforms power relations.

There is a wealth of foreign-language literature on the idea of translanguaging, which is translated as *transjęzykowość/ transjęzyczność* in the Polish literature (Grossman, 2019) or untranslated (Romanowski, 2018). As a teaching approach, translanguaging is considered creative and transformative, and is generally seen as effective, while as a linguistic theory it sometimes remains controversial (Wei, 2018). An important goal behind translanguaging theory is challenging the hierarchical nature of languages and addressing the inequalities and symbolic violence encountered by speakers of minority languages, especially in English-speaking countries (García & Wei, 2014), but also by speakers of local languages in former colonial territories (Turner & Lin, 2020). Researchers who explore translanguaging theory, instead of studying dominant, hegemonic languages – French, Chinese, or German, for example – as purely "external social constructs" (Vogel & García, 2017), position them as an element of internal dialogue that is activated to produce meaning. They view these national languages as external social constructs in the sense that they are imposed on the speaker, but the way speakers appropriate these constructs in the learning process is dialogic: the way majority languages are imposed and the way they are used are not the same thing (Otheguy et al., 2015). Scholars defined the lexical and structural features that an individual uses to communicate as the "idiolect," the speaker's linguistic repertoire of choice (Turner & Lin, 2020). The prefix *trans-* suggests a process that results in a new, complex reality and forms an independent phenomenon; it implies transformation, creative reshaping, expanding, clashing, and transcending the limits of language. The second part of the word – *languaging* – means "thinking and writing across languages" and highlights the dynamics and complexity of human ways of using language and functioning in linguistic reality. Such a model allows us to describe language as dynamic, mobile, and functioning within social, cultural, historical, and political contexts. It is language understood as an action or activity, something we do, rather than a structure or material that we derive something from. This relationship can be illustrated in the form of an equation: trans + languaging = people's "ways with words" (Romanowski, 2018). By the same token, translanguaging does not refer to

two or more separate languages or to the synthesis of different linguistic activities. It is rather an activity that brings to light the complexity of interaction between people with different linguistic backgrounds, often stemming from the national identity of a particular interlocutor. In the translanguaging model, the individual languages of English, Spanish, or Russian are referred to as "having" a social reality because they are socially constructed and therefore belong to specific interlocutors, they are not political property nor do they belong to specific countries or regions (e.g., English does not belong to Britain, Canada, or the United States). Translanguaging is and can be freely applied in multilingual schools or in communities that use minority (including immigrant) languages. It is a perspective that guides our understanding toward a more inclusive pedagogy that values and supports diversity.

To better understand this concept, we can compare a child's mind to a watercolor painting, where each color represents a language familiar to the child. We cannot tell exactly where they begin or end, because the boundaries are not clearly defined: they overlap, creating new colors. It is in the same way that languages are enmeshed, entangled in the child's mind (Núñez Gutiérrez, 2023). In an educational context, translanguaging can be viewed as an effective pedagogical strategy to optimize the linguistic, social, and cognitive abilities of the student and teacher in the classroom. Translanguaging pedagogy, understood as the methodical mobilization of students' entire linguistic repertoire and the promotion of productive contact between languages, is currently being advocated (with some caveats) among the scientific community and actively explored by teachers in the classroom (Turner & Lin, 2020). In fact, more than any other practice or pedagogy, translanguaging supports the cultivation of home language. Jim Cummins, an advocate of this approach, described three multilingual educational projects implemented in Canada over the past 20 years addressed to second-language learners: Linguistically Appropriate Practice (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012), Dual Language Showcase, and the Multiliteracies Project (Cummins, 2019).

Applications

Diversity pedagogy is a complex, dynamic, and innovative sub-discipline that has various implications for teaching practice. It has critical potential because it challenges the unjust power relations inherent in linguistic hierarchies, transforms social representations of minority linguistic identities, and engages learners in efforts for social change. It also has the potential to arrange the workspace within and against structural and ideological constraints in order that we can design alternative, dynamic approaches that transcend the binary, simplistic monolingual outlook of language education (Lau & Van Viegen, 2020). In practice, it implies a certain attitude, a state

of mind, a way of functioning in the school classroom. Thus, there is a case for promoting changes in early language education policies that will recognize the ability of children's multilingual and multicultural potentials to interact with each other as an important knowledge resource, respect their linguistic repertoires, and allow them to become relevant in learning situations. Researchers suggest that when children are exposed to different languages and cultures at an early age, they can develop the cultural understanding and communicative competencies necessary to thrive in an increasingly multilingual and multicultural world (Coelho & Ortega, 2020). The potential of Ukrainian children joining Polish schools on a larger scale than before should be seen as an opportunity to accelerate change in language and culture education at every stage. The meeting of the two languages can have a liberating effect (positive transfer). Many factors can facilitate this process: children will quickly master the pronunciation because it is similar, as are listening comprehension and speaking, and the vocabulary should not be very hard to learn because it does not sound foreign. Older students are no strangers to the Latin alphabet, because they are learning English. It is worth making the presence of children from Ukraine an asset: they bring us their culture and language, which helps us better understand both ourselves and others. A clearly noticeable trend in Poland today toward closer dialogue between linguistics and language pedagogy (Gębal & Kumięga, 2020), certainly contributes to the development of effective strategies or models of education that support multilingualism. One example of good practice is the website of the Literacy for CLIL project (https://literacyforclil.edunext.io), which is available to all interested educators, with open courses such as *Literacy Approaches.*

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