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Multilingual testing and assessment: Paths to achieving social and pedagogic goals

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The 'multilingual turn' in education

- Accelerated human mobility and migration, technological advances and globalisation raise unprecedented challenges for social cohesion in superdiverse societies that require new forms of conviviality and tolerance, for the integration of people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

- This new social reality brings forth critical questions for researchers, policy makers and practitioners about the pivotal role of language teaching-learning, assessment and testing, so as to optimise the abilities of each and every student.

- In the EU, Member States are urged to provide opportunities for school students to acquire two languages in addition to their L1, to take advantage of the languages that they bring to the classroom and to establish language-friendly educational environments.

Plurilingualism in education

- In the wider European context, the 'multilingual turn' in education is making a compelling case for the development *plurilingual competence* across the curriculum.

- Plurilingualism, defined by the CEFR (2001) and further explained and described in the CEFR-CV (2018/2020), is distinct from multilingualism.

- Plurilingual competence, according to the CEFR-CV (p.28) involves the ability to call flexibly upon an inter-related, uneven, plurilinguistic repertoire to perform in ways such as the following:
  - To switch from one language, dialect or variety to another
  - To express oneself in one language and understand others expressing themselves in another language, language variety or communication mode
  - To call upon the knowledge of a number of languages to make sense of an oral or written text
  - To mediate between individuals with no common language or even with only a slight knowledge oneself.

Monolinugal assessment and testing

- Despite the 'multilingual turn' in language teaching now starting to consider the principles of multilingual curricula and pedagogies, of plurilingual and intercultural education (Conteh & Meier 2014; May 2013; Ortega 2013, 2014), language assessment and testing (A&T) are most commonly still in one single language.

- Actually, to make the multilingual turn in A&T is more challenging than to introduce it in teaching and learning practices (cf. Gorter & Cenoz 2017).

- Monolingualism in high-stakes language proficiency testing is particularly striking. Tests are designed to measure the competences and skills that learners have developed in one language at a time.

Resistance to multilingual A&T?

- The resistance to A&T is deep-rooted because:
  - Applied linguistics and language didactics have kept languages apart from one another for a long time – whether these are the foreign languages in the school curriculum or the official school language as a school subject
  - The language teaching, assessment and testing tradition have looked upon each language as a separate, self-contained system (Dendrinos 2004, Garcia & Flores 2012)
  - The compartmentalisation of languages for teaching and testing is still deeply entrenched in society, in the educational system and stakeholders (Shohamy 2011).

'Practical' reasons for monolingual A&T

- There are several practical reasons for keeping to the tradition of monolingual A&T, including the following:
  - National education systems in Europe (and elsewhere) are still strongly attached to monolingual school policies and curricular requirements
  - Language teachers still strongly believe that the separation of languages in the classroom is of major importance (Bravo-Granström 2019, Haukås 2016)
  - Language testers (and teachers) don't really know how to assess language skills or content knowledge using different languages, language varieties, or semiotic modes in combination with one another
  - There is insufficient evidence-based research on multilingual testing.

Other reasons for monolingual A&T

- Multilingual assessment and testing continue to be marginalised, largely due to the authority of the dominant testing and assessment paradigm.

- Resistance to multilingual assessment, and especially testing, is particularly strong in the **international language testing** industry on account of the symbolic and economic profit it stands to lose (Dendrinos 2013b).

- However, as the tide is turning, it is creating favourable conditions for (**g)localised language testing** (Karavas & Mitsikopoulou 2018), which are underlined by different ideologies than international language testing (Dendrinos, ibid).

Backwash effect of monolingual A&T

- Multilingual curricula in schools could perhaps facilitate the shift to language teaching for the development of **plurilingual competence**, if A&T also aim at appraising how learners use their plurilingual repertoire to create social meanings. That is, there will be **positive backwash effect** on teaching and learning.

- But curriculum designers, teachers and testers need to be convinced of the validity and fairness of multilingual assessment.

- Moreover, they need to see how this is done, how multilingual test/assessment tasks and exams are constructed by being presented with good practices and guidelines.

Multilingualism in A&T and research

- Research linked to multilingual A&T is beginning to appear in different social and educational contexts in Europe and beyond.

- Different projects involve some form of experimentation and trialling of bi- or multilingual instruments, designed to fulfil a socially informed educational purpose.

- As outcomes are disseminated though publications, useful practical ideas come to light about how to develop valid multilingual A&T tools, and how these may impact on literacy education.

Researching multilingual A&T

- In the next few slides, I present projects which have come to my attention and they are categorised according to the educational purpose they are meant to fulfil.

- Though social and pedagogical motive and rationale vary in each project, they are all grounded on:

  - language contact theories (Siemund 2008)

  - pedagogies involving codeswitching (Kay González-Vilbazo et al. 2013) and translanguaging (Garcia 2009)

  - the appreciation of plurilingualism involving linguistic mediation (CEFR-CV 2020, Dendrinos 2006 and 2013, Stathopoulou 2015).

Multilingual A&T for different functions

- The three categories of A& T projects that follow are:
  1) Those which involve multilingual tools for reasons of social justice
  2) Those which are to provide proof of bi-/multilingual proficiency
  3) Those which aim to support minority and regional languages
  4) Those which aim to help develop plurilingualism.

Fairness and social linguistic justice

- Projects in this category are motivated by the conviction that bi-/multilingual learners are disadvantaged by assessment tools designed for monolinguals.

- The assumption they are based on is that, if bi-/multilingual learners are accommodated (through a language they are more familiar with – as in the case of immigrant students) the assessment and testing instruments will be fairer, more socially just.

- A second assumption in this category of projects is that if the tools are fairer they will constitute more valid apparatuses with which to judge the learners' linguistic or subject-related knowledge.

The MulAE project

- The Multilingual Assessment in Education (MulAE) project was carried out in Belgium (Flanders) by the Centre for Diversity & Learning of the University of Ghent (De Backer, Slembrouck, & Van Avermaet 2020)

- It entailed an experiment involving two groups of fifth grade elementary school students participating in a computer-based science test.

- The experimental group got the test in two languages (Turkish/Dutch or Polish/Dutch) and the control group got the test with the items only in Dutch.

- The test was carried out online, allowing the research team to log (a) the number of switches from one language to the other, and (b) how long they stay at which page and language.

- One of the aims of the project has been to cope with validity issues through multilingual testing methods.

Israeli project

- Similar concerns, about how unfair it is for students whose home language is different than the official school language are being addressed by Shohamy (2009, 2011, 2015).

- A team of researchers are collecting data in Israel by testing students in a single language (Hebrew only) on the one hand, and in two language (Hebrew and Arabic or Hebrew and Russian in combination) on the other.

- The research subjects are immigrant students and Hebrew speakers whose home language is a minority language.

The South African project

- Though the concerns of the third research project I included in this category match those of the previous two, Heugh et al. (2016) drew attention to multilingual education policies, practices and assessment. The context was South Africa.

- The research team proceeded in large-scale multilingual assessment to measure th students' knowledge in three languages and permitted students to make use of their bilingual or multilingual repertoires in high-stakes examinations.

- The research team demonstrated that, while it is quite challenging to design and administer multilingual exams, it is possible to bring students' multilingual repertoires into the design of large-scale assessment.

- Longitudinal data from system-wide assessment further indicated that code-switching and translanguaging were effective when used to increase students' repertoires for both horisontal purposes and vertical access to language/s of power.

Providing proof of bi-multilingual competence

- More than one language has been used in testing and assessment instruments being developed to document test-takers' ability to use two languages in combination for professional purposes.

The Flanders project

- One of the projects in this category aims at creating a bilingual test for those who wish to secure an academic post in Flanders, in order to provide proof that test-takers are able to teach university-level courses using either or both the majority language in Northern Belgium, and English.

- Therefore, a test devised by the Flemish Interuniversity Testing Consortium (ITACE) was used with lecturers in HE who were required by the Ministry to provide proof that they can teach subjects in either the Dutch or the English curriculum.

- Researchers (van Splunder & Verguts 2017) investigated how the top-down implementation of the test was counterproductive in stakeholders' acceptance of this test as a means to ensure the quality of teaching and improve employability.

The Ottowa project

- Another bilingual test was developed for the staff of the bilingual university of Ottawa, Canada (as reported by Baker & Hope 2017), with a similar but also different twofold purpose: to provide proof that the academic staff:
  - can make adequate use of both French and English in all university functions, including socialising
  - can demonstrate their plurilingual competence (where resources from more than one language are employed in different instances of communication)

- The team, whose theoretical references derive from pedagogies of translanguaging, is attempting to co-define the specific language competency profile – including how languages interact with one another – and has been raising a series of questions on the basis of candidates having choice of language in response, such as What was the extent of translanguaging used by candidates in their responses?

The Mexican project

- In the third project of this category, carried out in the linguistically diverse state of Oaxaca, Mexico, the output was not an instrument to test competences or skills, but for the assessment and pedagogic use of plurilingual practices.

- It involved 40 language teachers who were asked to draw from existing translanguaging practices in their classrooms and to extend these strategies for integrating them into classroom assessment practices, Schissel et al. (2018) report.

- The teacher-participants completed two reading and writing tasks. While Task 1 was intentionally designed to engage learners' English and Spanish languages resources, Task 2 was restricted to English-only.

- Analysis of data indicated that pre-service English teachers performed better on the multilingual task than the monolingual task and that integrating multilingual resources within assessment design, allow test-takers to demonstrate more complex or high-order thinking skills in the language they are learning.

Indigenous languages project in Africa

- The fourth project under this category also involved teachers in a teacher preparation programme, but for a different purpose.

- Makalela (2014) explains that this project constituted an assessment of the efficacy of a teacher preparation programme that introduced the teaching of one African language to speakers of other African languages in order to produce multi-competent and multi-vocal teachers.

- A mixed method approach was used to elicit from a pool of 60 (30 experimental; 30 control group) multilingual pre-service teachers.

- The results of the study showed that translanguaging techniques used in the experimental class afforded the participants affective and social advantages as well as a deep understanding of the content.

- Similarly, a paired t-test showed a statistically significant differential performance in favour of the experimental group after three months of a translanguaging intervention programme.

Assessing multilingual competence to support minority languages

➡ In the projects of this category, multilingual assessment is viewed as a means for enhancing multilingual or plurilingual approaches to education, ultimately aiming to support minority languages being marginalised by the dominant language.

The Welsh project

- The first project in this category was carried out in Wales, and reported on by Lewis, Jones & Baker (2012) and Jones and Lewis (2014).

- Welsh and English alternate for different parts the same pedagogical activity in different school subjects. For instance, one of the languages is used for input and the other for output (e.g., students watch a video in English and discuss its content or write a summary in Welsh or vice-versa).

- Resorting to ideas from plurilingual pedagogies, the researchers' goal was to promote understanding of the content of a school subject and at the same time, help the development of the weaker language (Baker 2011).

- Taking into account the situation of Welsh as a minority language, Jones and Lewis (2014) think that it is necessary to systematically control the use of translanguaging, so that it does not result in the more frequent use of English.
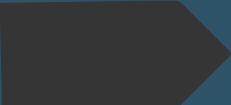
Basque country project

- The second project in this category was conducted in the Basque Country, aiming at the development of students' linguistic and metalinguistic awareness by integrating and relating Basque, Spanish and English.

- Based on a 'Focus on Multilingualism' approach, students' writing skills in the three languages were assessed.

- As reported by Gorter & Cenoz (2017), the researchers looked at patterns across languages and at learners' metalinguistic awareness, in order to understand to what extent these learners are aware of the way they use linguistic repertoire

Linguistic mediation for plurilingual competence

➡ The last category that my investigation yielded includes projects and actions aiming at the inclusion of linguistic mediation in language programmes, as the concept is defined and described by the CEFR-CV.

"Mediation in teaching, learning and assessment" (ME.T.L.A.)

- METLA is an ECML project (2020-2022) coordinated by Stathopoulou (2015) and supported by the CEM.

- Overall aim: to develop teacher awareness of how to develop tasks that use more than one language in teaching and assessment.

- Deliverables: (a) a teaching guide for cross-lingual mediation in the foreign language classroom, and (b) a digital repository with cross-linguistic mediation tasks to be adapted and used in different educational environments.

- The mediation tasks of both the teaching guide and the repository draw upon the new descriptors of the CEFR-CV.

- The project website: www.ecml.at/mediation

Linguistic mediation in Germany

- Shortly after the publication of the CEFR, Germany included cross-linguistic mediation into its national educational standards (2003) and, subsequently, into several federal curricula.

- It was also introduced into various school-leaving exams, such as the high-stakes *Abiturprüfung* (final exam in secondary education and part of a certification system granting access to universities).

- Elisabeth Kolb (forthcoming) describes the educational and administrative context that enabled this innovation to take root, she reviews the concepts of mediation underlying German educational standards and final exams in two languages and she discusses mediation tasks criteria and rating scales currently being evaluated.

Elisabeth Kolb's contribution is included in the forthcoming publication, entitled *Mediation as linguistic and cultural negotiation of meanings and plurilingualism*, edited by Dendrinos, to appear early 2022 by Routledge.

Linguistic mediation in Greece

- The inclusion of linguistic mediation started in 2003 in Greece also, as part of a much larger project, that of developing a national foreign language proficiency examination system into a multilingual examination suite known as the KPG.

- KPG uses cross-linguistic mediation test tasks in the writing and speaking test papers designed for B1, B2, C1 and C2 Greek learners of English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Turkish

- KPG also uses intra-linguistic mediation test tasks and other translingual practices in the test papers from level A1 to C2.

- As a result of extensive research carried out by the Greek KPG team for English, cross-linguistic mediation descriptors were incorporated in the the new curriculum adopted in 2016 as the national curriculum for the teaching and learning of languages in compulsory education.

The KPG project: a multilingual exam suite

- Within the framework of this (g)local exam system, the tests for all languages are developed – on the basis of common (for all languages) specifications and guidelines – by expert teams at the two universities involved (the NKUA and the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki).

- The two universities are also responsible for test-validation, training of examiners, development of reliable tools for script rating and applications for research purposes.

- They are also responsible for all the research and multileveled projects around the exams.

- The Greek Ministry of Education is responsible for exam administration, securing reliability of exam marking and scoring, issuing the results and bilingual certificates to successful candidates.

- The newest project involves the development of a computer adaptive language testing system.

https://rcel2.enl.uoa.gr/kpg/en

Mediation in the KPG exams

- Research on cross-linguistic mediation, as defined by Dendrinos (2006), began long before the publication of the CEFR-CV, but there are some similarities in how it was conceptualised by the Greek team, which was represented in the descriptor development phase of CEFR-CV by Stathopoulou.

- The research involved systematic test task analysis and description drawing data from the KPG Task Repository and different types of analyses of learner data obtained from the KPG Corpus.

- Results of the research on mediation have been published in Greek and other languages (eg. Dendrinos 2013a). In English, the most comprehensive work published is by Stathopoulou (2013a, 2013b, 2008) who empirically investigated, through textual analysis of Greek learners' scripts in English, their task-dependent mediation strategies at different levels of competence. A revised version of the thesis was published two years later (Stathopoulou 2015) by Multilingual Matters.

Linguistic mediation as a testing construct

- A paper by Dendrinos and Karavas (forthcoming) challenges the claim that has repeatedly been made by testing professionals that linguistic mediation cannot be tested

- It does so by presenting the KPG as a case study which can be used as a model for the inclusion of linguistic mediation in language proficiency testing

- The paper discusses how linguistic mediation is conceptualised and operationalised in the KPG exams, and presents the rationale for translingual practices in the test papers and the concepts of cross-linguistic and intra-linguistic mediation are explained, in connection with the theory of language on which the exams are grounded

- The paper also explains why KPG resorted to a bottom-up task-banking methodology rather than a top-down implementation of intuitive scaled descriptors and guidelines (as those in the CEFR-CV).

Dendrinos and Karavas' paper is included in the forthcoming publication, entitled *Mediation as linguistic and cultural negotiation of meanings and plurilingualism*, edited by Dendrinos, to appear early 2022 by Routledge.

In conclusion

➡ Multilingual assessment, and especially testing, is still an unchartered area, but there are many interesting research projects contributing to the development of a new research field.

➡ Given European concerns for multilingualism in education, it is important to develop collaborative projects across Member States (in the context of the European Education Area 2025, perhaps) to further analyse 'multilingual testing and assessment' research and practices, so as to be able to present 'best practices' in a unified, coherent discourse, as I have attempted to do and presented today.

Invitation to those interested

- In the context of CEM actions, a small-scale project has been initiated and its aims is to compare, through a mixed methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative data, eight (g)local or context-specific European language examination systems catering to one or more of the most widely taught and learnt European languages (English, French, German, Italian and Spanish).

- Ultimately, the purpose of the project is to ascertain if there is a real possibility to bridging the gaps between the eight exam systems and even out differences – providing that these would safeguard test validity and reliability, and ensure comparability of exam results.

- The drive behind such an undertaking is to be able to compare students' language competence across Europe, which at this point is not comparable.

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