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Promoting Plurilingualism: Majority Language in Multilingual Settings
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- Plurilingualism, or an individual’s ability to speak more than one language, has become a cornerstone of the European Union’s (EU) language policy. One of the key goals of EU language policy is for Europeans to speak at least two languages in addition to their mother tongue. Additionally, with immigration on the rise, many European school children’s first language is not the language of schooling. With individual plurilingualism as both goal and reality, there are political dimensions to the impetus for educational institutions to focus on the teaching and learning of other languages, and teaching through the medium of majority languages that are not always children’s first
languages. Researchers connected to the Council of Europe’s European Centre for Modern Languages have edited this volume to guide teachers and administrators in facilitating the **plurilingual shift**.

Many teachers espouse a teaching approach based on a monolingual paradigm, or the belief that only the target language should be used in the classroom (Igoudin, 2012). However, this approach ignores minority language speakers’ first and other languages and, often, dominant language speakers’ other languages as well. Responding to EU language policy, the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) suggest a plurilingual paradigm, because it recognizes students’ full linguistic and cultural competences as valuable background knowledge. ECML links a plurilingual approach that recognizes learner competences with enhanced academic achievement and reaching the EU’s language goals.

Until now, the contributors to this volume suggest, teachers adhering to a monolingual teaching approach have viewed individuals’ other languages as the sum of separate competences, placing languages in unconnected “boxes.” Conversely, teachers espousing a plurilingual teaching approach view all of the languages spoken by an individual “as a whole, comprising a unique and global set of competences available to an individual for use in different communicative needs and situations” (Coste & Simon, 2009, p. 173). The latter perspective meshes well with Cummins’s (1979) **interdependence hypothesis**, which holds that all of an individual’s languages are interconnected and stored in the same “box.” Teachers who espouse a plurilingual teaching approach draw on all of the competences available in an individual’s linguistic repertoire when teaching a new language. In order to fulfill the EU’s language policy goals, the ECML researchers urge teachers to shift from monolingual to plurilingual paradigms that build on students’ plurilingual repertoires (both their prior linguistic and cultural knowledge). They also suggest that this turn would better prepare migrant children to acquire the language of schooling and adapt to a new school environment.

The ECML publication stems from the MARILLE project, which translates as “**Majority Language Instruction as a Basis for Plurilingual Education**.” The publication specifically focuses on how to foster plurilingualism in secondary schools where instruction is through the medium of majority languages. It aims to guide language and content area teachers, teacher educators, head teachers, and curriculum developers in how to recognize, support and promote plurilingualism in “traditional” classrooms.

In the first of four chapters, the authors outline the objectives of the MARILLE project: “to research, collect and compare examples of principles, practice and strategies that show how plurilingualism can
be fostered in majority language teaching in secondary schools” (p. 8). They discuss the latter within the context of other ECML projects that support MARILLE (e.g., CARAP—“A Framework of References for Pluralistic Approaches”), explaining how the projects are interconnected and how they foster plurilingualism in schools.

In chapter 2 the authors specify how plurilingualism can be fostered in secondary schools, and the advantages of so doing for students and teachers. They also describe strategies for effecting change in schools. This section is particularly important because adopting a plurilingual approach to teaching requires a major paradigm shift, a shift that is difficult to achieve and happens slowly. Its success depends on adopting a bottom-up approach supported by teachers.

Chapter 3 presents five sample lessons that promote plurilingualism in language and content classes. Each sample lesson describes a lesson linked to the MARILLE project, and each is situated within the context of different countries in Europe. The chapter concludes with reflective questions to guide teachers’ implementation of the lessons, including how to encourage students to take ownership of their own learning.

Chapter 4 provides checklists that guide reflections by teachers, teacher educators, and head teachers on how to promote plurilingualism. The teacher checklists are intended to raise awareness of student heterogeneity in the classrooms, and of the need to know which languages students speak to integrate them in the classroom.

The handbook as a whole serves as a good tool for promoting a shift to a plurilingual teaching approach in secondary schools; however, an important element is missing if this handbook is to play a role in developing plurilingual “social actors” capable of reflecting on the “social complexities of linguistic plurality” (Coste & Simon, 2009, p. 168); it only focuses on making head teachers aware of language hierarchies, attitudes, and beliefs. Because power relationships between languages and cultures play a major role in the learning process, all educators must understand power relationships to be able to understand learners’ subjective realities (i.e., affective aspects of plurilingual social actors’ language learning experiences; Kramsch, 2009).

Learning Arabic in France is not the same as learning English or German. Neither is plurilingualism viewed the same way in an upper class district of Paris as it is in a school in the suburbs north of Paris that have a high immigrant population. To promote a plurilingual turn in teaching, questions of language hierarchies and linguistic and cultural representations must be understood by all educators and then discussed with students. More than linguistic issues must be considered to effect a plurilingual turn.
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*The Routledge Handbook of Multilingualism*

Marilyn Martin-Jones, Adrian Blackledge, and Angela Creese (Eds.).


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This handbook has sections covering discourses about multilingualism across political and historical contexts, multilingualism in relation to education and other institutional sites, social and cultural change, and “Situated Practices, Lived Realities.” There are 32 chapters, between 4 and 8 in each section, and a lengthy introduction by the editors, a “sociolinguistics of multilingualism for our times.” The chapters each sum up a complex research field; many conclude with suggestions for further research. While many contributions operate with distinct languages sharing sociolinguistic territory, others iconoclastically reject this conceptual framework, embrace fluidity and hybridity, and generate a plethora of concepts to capture what is perceived as new diversity.

There is a risk of overgeneralizing in handbook articles. Most articles in this one treat speech as though it is synonymous with language. Some contributors tend to be reinventing the wheel or renaming it. There is also a tendency to overstate the local (often Western) as though it applies globally, as in the incautious “the heterogeneity of