Empowering Language Learners in a Changing World through Pedagogies of Multiliteracies

Edited by
Vander Tavares

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Contents

Notes on Contributors

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List of Figures

Empowering Upper Elementary Multilingual Learners in Science Using Infographics

Supporting Multilingual Students' Agency and Identities Through Equity-Oriented, Critical Consciousness, and Community-Focused Multiliteracies

List of Tables

Multiliteracies and Picturebooks: A Gender-Based Critical and Aesthetic Engagement with Social Justice Through a Nonfictional Heroine

Recognising and Building Upon Multilingual Students' Identities and Knowledges in Mainstream Science Classrooms

Empowering Language Learners in a Changing World Through Pedagogies of Multiliteracies

Vander Tavares

This volume offers conceptual, theoretical, and empirical contributions to additional language (L2) education scholarship from a multiliteracies perspective. Multiliteracies, a term coined by a group of scholars known as the New London Group (NLG henceforth) (1996), reconceptualize literacy and literacy education in response to the evolving nature of society based on increasing cultural and linguistic diversity, technological innovation, and globalization. Kalantzis and Cope (2012) explained that the multiliteracies approach seeks to not only "explain what still matters in traditional approaches to reading and writing," but also "supplement this with knowledge of what is new and distinctive about the ways in which people make meanings in the contemporary communications environment" (p. 1). In light of continuous societal changes, the multiliteracies approach pluralizes dominant forms of literacy, going beyond reading and writing in the national language, and expands the

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traditional modes of meaning-making, moving beyond the linguistic (oral and written) to include the visual, auditory, gestural, spatial, and tactile (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009).

At least in principle, the conceptual shift toward plurality in the multiliteracies approach already creates new opportunities for student empowerment in L2 education. Since its inception as an academic field of study, L2 education has struggled to support cultural and linguistic diversity, despite diversity being the norm both on the local and on the international levels. In many contexts around the world, educational policies have even sought to suppress diversity by promoting the segregation, assimilation, or exclusion of students from a minority (sometimes labeled "diverse") background (Tzirides et al., 2023). Recognizing language and literacy practices as social practices that reflect the different identities of communities of speakers confronts the monoglossic fabric of L2 education sustained through the notion of literacy as singular, fixed, and decontextualized. The understanding that literacies are variable, situated, and historical contributes to the legitimization of the diverse language and literacy practices of all students, and also challenges L2 educators to reflect and redesign their pedagogies for inclusion.

When the conceptual vision for this volume emerged in 2022, artificial intelligence (AI) dominated discussions within the international education community. AI technology introduces and requires new literacies in L2 education in order to appropriately prepare students for the future workplace. Simultaneously, the now widespread presence of AI technology in education and research strengthens the need to further cultivate existing literacies, particularly critical literacies that seek to promote dispositions and skills in critical thinking, empathy, and social justice (Akgun & Greenhow, 2021). From one point of view, AI is framed as yet another threat to minoritized students in relation to not only access to the latest AI technologies in L2 education, but also the re/displacement of the same students by AI technologies focused on language use and production in the workplace. From another point of view, AI is considered a liberating force that allows L2 students to prioritize their individual creative and intellectual abilities to promote innovation in the workplace, and by extension, in the broader society (see Chapter 2 by Lim for a discussion).

In addition to global changes on the technological plane, the present is also characterized by profound humanitarian crises and political instability. Millions of people, including students, are now displaced from their homes and schools, waiting in uncertainty as the days go by (see Chapter 13 by Tavares and Benediktsson). In these grueling times, (L2) education plays an indispensable role as a site of hope, imagination, transformation, freedom, and social justice (Freire, 1994; hooks, 1994). This growing sociological complexity only further accentuates the relevance and potential of multiliteracies for student empowerment in L2 education in the twenty-first century. With its focus on integrating student identity into learning, repositioning students as active agents in the process of learning, and recognizing the making and interpreting of meaning as multimodal and cross-cultural (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015), multiliteracies and their supporting pedagogies have the potential to meaningfully contribute to the development of L2 students as engaged, critical, and compassionate citizens across boundaries, as well as designers of more just, equitable communities (Holloway & Gouthro, 2020; Schroeter, 2019).

This volume focuses on empowerment through multiliteracies by building on L2 pedagogies, L2 student agency and identity, though some chapters also consider L2 teachers and teacher educators. It illustrates possible paths toward L2 student empowerment through empirical case studies and conceptual-practitioner reflections from Australia, Brazil, Chile, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Singapore, Spain, and the United States. Some of the educational contexts represented include post-secondary, community, refugee, science, teacher, and language education. This introductory chapter aims to set the scene for the volume, beginning with a brief presentation of the development of multiliteracies and a conceptual discussion of agency and identity in L2 education. Subsequently, this chapter will examine how student empowerment may be undermined by prevailing ideologies of language and race in L2 education, which is a common concern to all chapters in this volume. Yet, this introductory chapter will also propose ways in which empowerment may be promoted and cultivated through pedagogies of multiliteracies in order to overcome ideological barriers.

From Literacy to Multiliteracies and Learning by Design

The early conceptualization of literacy (as singular and static) was interlaced in political and educational ideologies that homogenized student identity at the expense of diversity. Up until the time of the proposal for multiliteracies (NLG, 1996), but even to this day, though to a lesser extent, linguistic diversity in schools was regarded as a growing cultural problem. On the individual student level, to be plurilingual[1] was understood as not only a problem, but also a deficit, which needed to be mitigated and overcome. During most of the twentieth century in English-speaking countries, literacy education was primarily a non-formal kind of education that functioned through a dichotomy: a person was either literate or illiterate in the majority language (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). Literacy education operated with the aim of teaching "illiterate" students—often adults with little or interrupted formal education—to count, read, and write in the majority language so as to give these students "a second chance" to return to school and complete their studies and/or become employable in positions previously unavailable to them (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, p. 4).

The works of Paulo Freire broke ground during that time, especially in post-colonial contexts. Freire's works, particularly *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970), gave rise to critical pedagogies or critical literacies in Brazil and Chile, which later powerfully influenced the works of literacy scholars, including those in the NLG (1996) (see Chapter 3 by Tavares). Freire argued and demonstrated that being illiterate/literate was about maintaining unequal power relations between the oppressor and the oppressed. Freire denounced schooling as a project of the elites that sought to maintain the working-class passive and subordinate. To be literate was not enough if literacy did not lead to student empowerment and liberation. As such, Freire introduced the notion of

[1] I use plurilingual to discuss, at the individual level, what has been traditionally understood as multilingual. In this volume, both plurilingual and multilingual are used by different chapter authors to qualify individual students' relationships with language(s), thereby reflecting different scholarly traditions in diverse parts of the world.

critical literacies to support the development of students' critical awareness (*conscientização*) of their own realities, social injustice, and the true meaning of education (Tavares, 2023b). However, Freire's ideas were considered radical and dangerous for that time, since they confronted the ontology and purpose of formal education systems, which he termed as the banking system of education (Freire, 1970).

Building on such political movements, the multiliteracies approach recognized students' (unequal) lived experiences as resources for learning (NLG, 1996). Students were seen as whole individuals and no longer as "empty vessels" for the deposit of information by authority figures. The NLG (1996) positioned students as "active designers—makers—of social futures" (p. 64) who navigate multiple experiences within their lifeworlds: a "space" in which their diverse personal, public, and professional life experiences reside and intersect, and a "space" from which they draw their multifaceted meaning-making systems. While in traditional (literacy) education the student is the recipient of textbook information, in pedagogies grounded in multiliteracies the student plays an agentic role in leading, designing, and contextualizing their own education (see Chapter 7 by Brinkmann). Of course, to support such a transformative vision of education, every component of literacy education, from material design and assessment to student–teacher roles and where learning takes place, must be continuously reassessed and potentially recreated (see Chapter 4 by Michelson on assessment and Chapter 12 by Arshavskaya on museum-based learning).

The social trends identified by the NLG in 1996 underwent rapid change in the following years as technology evolved and permeated every dimension of life. Cope and Kalantzis (2009) proposed an "update" to the conceptual foundation of multiliteracies in 2009. To support the changing needs and goals of the multiliteracies approach, the scholars put forth a pedagogical framework called *Learning by Design*, consisting of four knowledge processes or things students can do to know. This framework classifies activity types, but does not "prescribe the order of activities, nor which activity types to use. These will vary depending on the subject domain and the orientation of learners" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015, p. 17). The knowledge processes included are experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing, and applying. Research has continuously

demonstrated the ways in which these knowledge processes support the development of skills and capabilities considered essential for the twenty-first century not only in L2 education, but also every other school subject (see Cope & Kalantzis, 2015, for a recent and multidisciplinary collection of case studies).

Briefly Unpacking L2 Student Identity and Agency

Identity is now conceived of primarily from sociocultural and poststructuralist perspectives in L2 education. The "social turn" in the field (Block, 2003) shifted the theoretical orientation on identity from one anchored in psycholinguistics to a more critical one in which social, historical, and political dimensions of identity development are foregrounded. Through poststructuralist perspectives, the L2 student was "liberated" from having an identity that was permanently tied to or associated with a single sociological aspect of their lives, one often decided and imposed by others from dominant groups. Language and language use have become the site of identity construction and analysis: "it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self within and across a range of sites at different points in time" (Norton, 2010, pp. 350–351). In this sense, identity may be seen as dynamic and complex, and characterized by a student's multiple and intersecting identity positions and affiliations. Social interaction functions as the principal locus for identity construction and enactment.

Identity tends to be examined in conjunction with agency in L2 education research. As a construct, agency is also theorized from multiple disciplinary traditions. A prominent stance on agency concerns the roles played by the sociocultural and local environments in contextualizing and mediating L2 students' ability to act agentively (Kalaja et al., 2016). As such, agency may be understood as some kind of action situated in a particular time and place that is intended to bring about change. Nevertheless, agency also depends on the L2 student as an individual with "physical, cognitive, affective, and motivational capacities to act"

(Mercer, 2012, p. 42). Martin (2004) proposed that agency is the "capability of individual human beings to make choices and act on these choices in a way that makes a difference in their lives" (p. 135). This volume supplements such a take by highlighting two important points: first, agency involves, in addition to capability, the emotions of the individual at least as a point of departure; and second, agency need/should not be self-centered: one can and must also bring about changes for the benefit of the other.

Challenging Ideologies of Language and Race in L2 Education Through Multiliteracies

A major area of concern of critical L2 research and practice has focused on language ideologies in L2 education and their impact on plurilingual teachers and students. Native-speakerism, an ideology that culturally and linguistically elevates speakers who acquired the target language early in life (Holliday, 2015), has shaped the foundation of L2 education through pedagogical theories, methods, and materials that do not actually reflect the ways in which language is dynamically and creatively used in linguistically diverse contexts, which historically characterizes, in fact, most parts of the world (García, 2014; Lanza, 2007). Nevertheless, L2 education has generally expected L2 students to sound like "native speakers." Pacek (2005) maintained that "the prevailing conviction among language learners, their parents, or even people directly involved in language education, is that the best teacher of a language is a NS [native speaker]" (p. 244). Native-speakerism has also influenced L2 schools to prioritize and justify the hiring of teachers based largely on one's language status in the target language—that is, being a "native speaker"—rather than on actual competence and education (Alshammari, 2021).

Another pervasive language ideology in L2 education is monolingualism. A monolingual bias or mindset often includes a fixed association between one language, place, and people in representations of the target language and culture (Grover, 2023; see Chapter 10 by Book). The use of multiple languages in L2 classrooms is thus viewed as a problem

that hinders target language acquisition, and in some contexts, translanguaging continues to be banned or looked at with suspicion (Macedo & Bartolomé, 2014). Monolingualism perpetuates a false and paradoxical belief that for a plurilingual teacher or student of the L2 to be seen as a competent and authentic L2 user in the target language community, they must abandon their diverse linguistic practices and knowledges, and therefore remain as monolingual as possible (Tavares, 2022). Yet, monolingualism naturally reinforces native-speakerism, since to become monolingual means to police and avoid any marker of plurality in one's language use so as to remain as "native" as possible. In this sense, monolingualism directly undermines educational initiatives to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in schools and communities.

Monolingualism shaped the foundation of Western language literacy for both L1 and L2 education. Within such a context, the focus has been on not only the national language, but also the standard variety of the national language (NLG, 1996). Here, we see the far-reaching impact of language ideologies: monolingualism erases *all* students' linguistic and cultural repertoires and therefore their diverse and multiple literacy practices, for the standard variety (of the L1 or the L2) is based on the variety spoken by the upper classes, which repeatedly intersects with race and education (Tollefson, 2007). Moreover, for students in bilingual language education settings, monolingualism helped to preserve, through language policy and pedagogy, the bilingual student as someone having two discrete monolingual repertoires that supposedly do not merge in the students' everyday language use, in addition to both being hierarchically organized based on notions of language prestige (García & Wei, 2015). A multiliteracies perspective recognizes these political issues by calling for pedagogy to reflect "an epistemology of pluralism that provides access [to social power] without people having to erase or leave behind different subjectivities" (NLG, 1996, p. 72).

From the same critical perspective, it has become evident that it is impossible to discuss language ideologies without also discussing race in L2 education. The construction of the "native speaker" as politically neutral, devoid of race and embodiment, which in turn masks native-speakerism as an ideology focused only on language, has been powerfully challenged by scholars working from multiple theoretical and empirical

positions, particularly those stemming from post-colonial and decolonial perspectives (Motha, 2014; R'boul, 2023; Tavares, 2023a). The history of language teaching methodology in the West is marked by the absence of an analysis of the intersection of race and language (Tavares & Melo-Pfeifer, 2024; see Chapter 6 by Ferreira in this volume). More recently, however, the emergence of raciolinguistic ideologies has afforded a more systematic examination of the interplay of ideologies of language and race in L2 education (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Approaching L2 education from a raciolinguistics perspective helps to unveil processes of racialization through language for minoritized students (see Chapter 5 by Asher Golden).

Raciolinguistics "expands the frame of language ideologies and underscores symbolic linkages between race, class and language" (Ricklefs, 2021, p. 91). From a raciolinguistics perspective, racist associations between race and language are naturalized, thereby further reinforcing social hierarchies. Raciolinguistic ideologies help to maintain exclusive notions of legitimacy and authenticity in L2 education by positioning only certain racial groups as the legitimate speakers of the target language, which has consequences for plurilingual, racialized students and teachers in all domains of lived experience. Taking these issues into account, multiliteracies pedagogies emerge to empower L2 students and teachers by "destabilizing, crossing and ultimately deconstructing various boundaries that are sociohistorically constructed" (Lin et al., 2021, p. 16). The starting point in the multiliteracies approach is the lifeworld of the L2 student, rather than the (imagined) one of a White, "native speaker." This means that L2 students' language and literacy practices are valued in their own right (see Chapter 11 by Ramos and colleagues).

Multiliteracies pedagogies offer L2 learners an opportunity to critically reflect on their own identities as they learn through multiple modalities and senses. L2 education founded upon multiliteracies "offers minority students more points of reference since it uses their lifeworlds as teaching resources considerably more than traditional forms" (Burke & Hardware, 2015, p. 146; see Chapter 8 by Veliz and Chan). As such, the potential for multiliteracies pedagogies to advance contextual forms of social justice in critical and creative ways is one of the main reasons

for its continued implementation in L2 education (see Chapter 9 by Reyes-Torres and colleagues for an example). Nevertheless, it is also indispensable that pedagogies of multiliteracies be employed to confront global and systemic issues of injustice—including by further decolonizing literacy, language, and knowledge—that affect all minoritized groups of L2 students (Menezes de Souza, 2016). The next section concludes this introductory chapter by presenting a summary of the chapters.

Organization of Volume and Main Contributions

In Chapter 2, Lim reflects on the applications of multimodality on learning and maps the terrain by introducing three dimensions: multimodality *for* learning, multimodality *as* learning, and multimodality *in* learning. Multimodality *for* learning involves the use of multimodal resources to support language and subject content learning, in recognition of the multimodal nature of disciplinary knowledge representations. Multimodality *as* learning extends literacy beyond language, with a focus on multimodal meaning-making in the development of students' multimodal literacy skills as well as assessing students' multimodal literacy and evaluating their artifacts. Multimodality *in* learning focuses on teachers' orchestration of multimodal resources in the classroom as embodied teaching. Lim also includes studies on multimodal critical discourse analysis of classroom resources as well as the use of multimodal learning analytics and artificial intelligence to analyze students' signs of learning and measure engagement in the learning process. Lim concludes by discussing the desiderata, or things desired, as work still to be done to advance the field and future research directions in relation to the three dimensions of multimodality and learning.

In Chapter 3, Tavares provides a comparative and contrastive reading of Freirean educational philosophy and a pedagogy of multiliteracies to foreground possible convergencies and divergencies. Freirean educational philosophy and a pedagogy of multiliteracies, with its reformulations over the years, have had a major influence on L2 education. After all,

the goal of valuing and building on student diversity as well as of legitimizing minoritized students' lived experiences so as to promote empowerment corresponds with the concerns of critical L2 education in light of the political, social, cultural, and linguistic injustices perpetuated by L2 education through its early monolingual, monocultural, and native-speakerist foundation. Yet, the ways in which Freirean educational philosophy and a pedagogy of multiliteracies go about conceptualizing and implementing "strategies" to reach such a goal differ in some domains, despite their formative convergencies. These divergencies are not a result of the intricacies of L2 education per se, but rather from how both propositions conceive of education more broadly and from where they depart in terms of their historical-political context.

In Chapter 4, Michelson argues for more flexible lenses on assessment than those suggested by proficiency or competence-based models by proposing the notion of *design* as a theoretical lens for evaluating students' textual productions, and by extension, for use in assessment schemes in foreign language teaching and learning. Through a purposive sample of textual productions and reflections of two students in a multiliteracies-based intermediate French language course, Michelson not only demonstrates the emergence of agency when students' own interest and learning goals are accounted for, but also proposes several pedagogical strategies for opening up space for students to achieve their own goals through personally marked meaning-making.

In some U.S. schooling contexts, Latine/Latinx emergent bilingual students experience subtractive schooling, a process that can have lasting effects on these students' lives. In Chapter 5, Asher Golden shares an analysis of one such student's narratives as the student, Mariana, navigates educational institutions, limitations, and opportunities. Mariana, who as an elementary-age Spanish speaker was pushed to give up her L1 as she became acculturated into the world of English-dominated monoglossic schooling, experienced her formative years of schooling as a process that required separation from family and heritage/linguistic community. Through the Conexiónes program, a place-based "second-chance" secondary-level program, Mariana experienced a multiliteracies pedagogy that valued multiple linguistic and cultural resources, and situated knowledge in local communities and dialogical projects rather than