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Translanguaging in ESOL: Competing Positions and Collaborative Relationships

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Introduction

This chapter addresses a central issue for researchers, practitioners and policy-makers in the field of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). This is the branch of English language teaching and learning which concerns adult migrants in English-dominant countries. The issue is the extent to which a multilingual or translanguaging stance should be supported in ESOL pedagogy. It is prompted by a recognition that competence in English is typically developed by adult migrants as part of a multilingual, multimodal communicative repertoire, used fluidly and flexibly, in spaces that are often heavily multilingual. My discussion is based on the study of activity on an email forum called ESOL-Research, an online environment which (following Gee, 2005) I characterise as a Semiotic Social Space. This is defined by Gee as an online space (as opposed to a community) which has content (i.e. something for the space to be about), and particular ways of organising social interactions in relation to that content.

In this chapter I refer directly to the UK context, though my discussion relates to migrant language education worldwide. The chapter draws upon research carried out during a multi-site ethnographic study of urban multilingualism, Translation and Translanguaging (TLANG) project¹. Findings from TLANG, in common with other work in the sociolinguistics of migration, suggest that the dominant language of the UK is not necessarily the only language to which people need access in their social or work life. The multilingual reality of ESOL learners' lives tends not to be acknowledged in either ESOL policy or practice, however, suggesting an inherent contradiction in the ESOL policy-practice-research nexus between a monolingual approach to ESOL teaching (on one hand) and (on the other) the multilingual experience of ESOL students outside their classrooms. I discuss this contradiction with specific attention to ESOL in the UK, and from my own perspective informed by research and experience. After this introduction, I elaborate on the positions adopted in educational and public discourse towards the use of English in migrant language education vis-à-vis the use of other languages. I follow by describing collaborative relationships between practitioners across the range of ESOL provision, policy-makers, and other interested people that led to the development of the Semiotic Social Space of the ESOL-Research forum². I then present an examination of an outcome of these collaborative relationships, an e-seminar hosted on the forum whose aim was to bring together, in productive interaction, research findings on multilingualism with practitioner/policy concerns about its relevance to classroom practice. I conclude by reflecting upon

how language education policy remains intractably monolingualist and monolingualising, even as the UK's urban – and increasingly its rural – places and spaces become more multilingual.

Monolingualism in Practice and Policy

The TLANG project focused on the ways in which linguistic and other semiotic resources are used in urban contexts where speakers have different proficiencies in a range of languages and varieties. TLANG research has findings in common with other sociolinguistic work on language and literacy practices specifically in migration contexts (e.g. Roberts et al., 1992) and more generally (e.g. Blommaert & Backus, 2011), showing that speakers in such contexts are not confined to using languages separately, unless there are work-related or institutional reasons to do so. In most home and social communication they move fluidly across languages, styles, registers and genres – that is, they translanguage – as they attempt to make meaning. Hence there is a growing understanding of the multilingual, indeed translanguaging, realities of communication in the ESOL students' daily lives, linguistically and culturally diverse as they are. There is consequently greater knowledge of the rich range of language repertoires and other communicative resources – as well as the funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) accrued through life experience – which multilingual adults who are ESOL students bring along with them into any interaction, including, potentially, classroom interaction. Despite this, ESOL teachers only rarely make systematic use of students' full linguistic repertoires in pedagogy, to the extent that some ESOL classrooms are explicitly monolingual 'English only' spaces where multilingual language practices are viewed as being uncondusive to learning and are prohibited.

Practice

Positioning multilingualism as a problem in ESOL echoes a pervasive monolingual ideology evident in language education and in educational spaces in the English-dominant west more generally. The ability to use languages other than English in a repertoire is widely regarded as problematic rather than advantageous to students' learning (Cummins, 2000) and 'something to be overcome' (Safford & Drury, 2013: 70). The monolingual bias in language education is especially evident in approaches associated with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Here the goal of L2 learning is often assumed to be native-like mastery, or native-speaker competence. This tendency has its origins in an understanding that the emphasis in language teaching should be less on linguistic form and more about communicative function. This is essentially on the grounds that what learners need to learn is what native speakers actually do with their language in natural contexts of use (Wilkins, 1972; Brumfit & Johnson, 1979).

The notion of the native speaker is heavily contested by sociolinguists (e.g. Rampton, 1990). A sociolinguistically-oriented counter-argument to the perception that native-speaker competence should be the aim of language instruction rests on the idea that people who speak differently from the

arbitrary group labelled ‘native speakers’ are not using linguistic forms that are better or worse: they are just speaking differently. This is conceptually (and ideologically) challenging for many language learners themselves, as well as for their teachers.

Those who regard multilingualism as a problem for language teaching, and who promote a monolingual approach, also echo a much earlier development in language education, the reform movement of the late nineteenth century. The reform movement was responding to the traditional language teaching approach of grammar-translation, upon which much classroom practice had rested hitherto. Hall & Cook (2012) point to the work of Maximilian Berlitz in particular as exerting a powerful influence on language teaching, all the way to present times. Berlitz’ language schools were founded on the principle that the use of students’ expert languages must be prohibited in the classroom. Hall & Cook (2012: 275) describe the monolingual principle thus: ‘Classes in which students are speakers of a variety of languages, and the employment of native speaker teachers who do not necessarily know the language(s) of their students, created situations in which bilingual teaching seemed to be impossible.’ Twenty-first century ESOL pedagogy adopts a monolingual position for much the same reason.

Policy

Like their teachers, the managers of many centres where ESOL is taught also adopt strict policies requiring students to speak no languages other than English in their classrooms, maintaining that ‘English Only’ is the best approach. The personal, institutional and professional discourses about ‘English Only in the ESOL classroom’ are redolent of, and indeed partly comprise, ways of speaking about language and migration in public and in policy that help shape the landscape of adult migrant language education. A policy debate in recent years is how English is implicated in the construction of national identity. That is, what is the connection between the English language and the notion of ‘Britishness’ (Cooke & Peutrell, 2019)? ESOL is part of this debate, one in which migrant language learners themselves frequently find themselves centre-stage.

Despite its very obviously multilingual population, the UK is often represented as a monolingual state, or perhaps as a bilingual one in Wales and Scotland. The association of a British national identity with English is underpinned by a strong ‘one nation one language’ ideology. Accordingly, in order for British society to be cohesive and stable, its population must share a common language. This ideology is evident not just in the UK: similar discourse is a key feature of nation state-building almost everywhere. And in parallel with elsewhere, in the processes that comprise UK language policy, understanding, using and being tested in the standard language of the new country is not only a proxy for national unity, but also for integration, social cohesion and social mobility (Casey, 2016). Language education is heavily implicated in immigration legislation too: people applying for settlement in the UK are required to pass an English language examination in addition to the Life in the UK citizenship test (which itself must be taken in English, Welsh or Scottish

Gaelic), and a good deal of effort in the field of ESOL is expended in preparing students for assessments to satisfy the requirements for citizenship and naturalisation.

Multilingual Orientations

It is perhaps not surprising then that language and literacy education for migrants in practice and in policy still distinguishes between the so-called native speaker and non-native speaker, rarely embracing bilingualism or multilingualism, or recognising the purpose of language instruction as the development of a multilingual repertoire. Yet the boundaries between languages in use are fluid and porous, as noted above, and can be associated with an increasingly unclear distinction between native speakers and non-native speakers in practice.

An 'English Only' orientation in language education has not gone unchallenged, on cognitive, affective and pedagogical grounds (Nation, 1978; Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009; Cook 2010). In ESOL and ESOL literacy likewise; and in this field there is also a strong tradition of critical pedagogy. This body of theoretical and practical work is oriented towards equipping students with the communicative tools to enhance their audibility. Advocates of critical ESOL literacy reject monolingualism in L2 literacy teaching, positing that teaching students literacy in the L2 rather than the L1 is unlikely to be effective. Drawing on research into biliteracy they argue that adults learning literacy for the first time learn more effectively if literacy is taught in a language they know (Riviera & Huerta-Macias, 2008). Writing about the US context, Auerbach (1993: 18) suggests:

The result of monolingual ESL instruction for students with minimal L1 literacy and schooling is often that, whether or not they drop out, they suffer severe consequences in terms of self-esteem; their sense of powerlessness is reinforced either because they are de facto excluded from the classroom or because their life experiences and language resources are excluded.

The teachers who participated in the e-seminar I describe below are employed in the linguistically-diverse contexts where their ESOL students live, work and socialise: for at least some of them, restricting classroom language use to only the 'target language' appears to have even less justification. How they might move towards a multilingual, and – beyond that – towards a translanguaging orientation towards their teaching is the topic of the later parts of the next section.

ESOL-Research and the TLANG E-Seminar

The ESOL-Research email forum is an online environment for discussion, a message board, a space for debate and activism, and a cohesive tool for ESOL teachers with an interest in research which impinges on their practice. I instigated ESOL-Research in June 2006, as a way of keeping in contact with the teachers and researchers working on a project on which I was employed as a researcher, the

ESOL Effective Practice Project (EPPP: Baynham, Roberts et al. 2007). The ESOL-Research forum is not an online community (though it has characteristics of a community), but rather is a Semiotic Social Space, as defined by Gee (2005). Gee developed the notion of a Semiotic Social Space as a response to the idea of a Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998), considering it less of a community and more of a loose affiliation. Gee suggests that ‘Community of Practice’ tends to be used too freely: ‘community’ has connotations of belongingness and close-knit ties, and is not necessarily a good label for just any group of individuals who happen to have something in common. Moreover, ‘community’ brings with it notions of membership, which can mean so many different things to different people in different sites that it is not necessarily a helpful idea. Sometimes, Gee argues, we should begin with spaces (virtual or physical) rather than people, when considering forms of social configuration. The defining characteristics of a Semiotic Social Space are that it has some content, something for the space to be about, and that there are particular ways of organising thoughts, beliefs, actions, and social interactions in relation to that content. For subscribers to ESOL-Research, rather than belonging to a community as members, what links them is the aboutness of teaching, learning, policy and research around adult migrant language education, usually in the UK.

The communicative practices associated with ESOL-Research respond to this potentially very broad content. At some times the discussion might be about a particular pedagogic issue. In quiet periods the main activity might be the posting of job advertisements or requests for information or advice about a teaching concern. But when there happens to be a particularly contentious policy move that affects adult ESOL, traffic on the forum increases, and posts will tend to offer more in-depth personal and institutional perspectives on policy.

From its foundation to the time of writing a dozen years later, the policy landscape within which the ESOL-Research forum is located has changed hugely, and the discussion on the forum has reacted accordingly. In particular, ESOL-Research has provided a vital space for the debate and contestation of policy moves that threaten the field. In the early years of the twenty-first century, ESOL, along with Literacy and Numeracy, was positioned in national policy as an adult basic skill, part of the Skills for Life strategy. Since the demise of Skills for Life in 2009 the responsibility for coordination of ESOL has been handed from national to local government, there have been successive cuts to funding associated with the promotion of austerity measures, and – as noted earlier – ESOL has become ever more closely associated with immigration policy. ESOL-Research has at times become a space for activism: for example the pressure group Action for ESOL (<http://actionforesol.org/>) was founded as a consequence of debate in its space.

The TLANG Project and the E-Seminar

The prime purpose of the ESOL-Research forum is the discussion and debate of research and policy that relates to practice. For the remainder of the chapter I describe a discussion at the intersection of research, policy and practice, an e-seminar that took place on the forum in spring 2017 as part of the

activities of the TLANG project. The topic of the e-seminar was ‘Translanguaging, superdiversity and ESOL,’ and it took as a point of departure two questions for discussion:

1. What are some of the challenges and opportunities that contemporary diversity might present to teachers and curriculum planners working in the field of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)?
2. English might be just one of many languages which ESOL students encounter day-to-day. They may well be developing their competence in a range of varieties of English as part of a multilingual repertoire, and may be translanguaging as a matter of course. How might ESOL teachers and their students address this multilingual reality in their classrooms?

The seminar also touched on the contested issue of ‘English Only’ in the classroom, and the ideologies informing the competing stances on this matter. As a prompt for discussion, a selection of videos, audio transcripts and field notes from the TLang project was made available online. The first post of the seminar was a response to these materials by three discussants, ESOL practitioners and researchers Dermot Bryers (English for Action, London), Melanie Cooke (King’s College London) and Becky Winstanley (Tower Hamlets College, London). Then the seminar was opened to the 1100 or so ESOL-Research subscribers for contributions to the discussion, and it ran for ten days. There were 37 messages in total during the course of the seminar. Despite the relatively small number of actual posts, the seminar was an active event. The website on which the data was presented was viewed 1665 times between January and March 2017 by 398 unique visitors from a globally-spread audience. The top ten countries where the audience resided were: UK (1040 views); US (116); Japan (72); Italy (57); Canada (48); Australia (43); Germany (39); Finland (39); Belgium (19) and Greece (17).

Discussant response

In their response to the first question, the discussants mentioned emergent findings from their research on the Diasporic Adult Language Socialisation study (DALSS)³ and other participatory ESOL work they have been involved in, and how these findings might be usefully incorporated into ESOL teaching and learning (see also Cooke et al., 2018; 2019). The discussants raised important questions about the challenges and also opportunities presented to ESOL teachers and curriculum planners by the superdiversity (Creese & Blackledge, 2018; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Vertovec, 2010) of students in ESOL classes, not only in terms of ethnicity, country of origin, religion and language but also in their reasons for migrating, their migration trajectories and the class differences which manifest in the different opportunities available for work, housing and other resources. The challenges and opportunities, as they noted, are manifold:

- How can we meaningfully include all participants in such a highly diverse single space of the classroom?
- How can we learn about and then draw on the complexity of the backgrounds and lives of our students in such a way that it can inform our teaching?
- How can we find lesson content which will be engaging for all, especially in participatory approaches such as ours which seek to address social and political themes?
- How can we realistically support diverse groups of migrant students to navigate the demands made of them in the workplace, their communities and in their daily lives?
- How can we utilise the sheer range of linguistic resources shared by a group of students in our pedagogical approaches?

They responded to the second discussion question by noting that the UK is witnessing an upsurge of nationalism and anti-migrant feeling, ‘much of which is focussed on speakers of languages other than English’, and that at such a time it is ‘more important than ever to make sure that the ESOL classroom is a multilingual space free from such prejudice, where students feel comfortable expressing themselves in any language or combination of languages without fear of discrimination or recriminations; a multilingual classroom with a robust multilingual pedagogy is undoubtedly something we should be aiming for.’ They continue:

This, however, is easier said than done, partly because of [...] logistical problems [...] and partly because some students and teachers – as well as their employing institutions – hold deep-seated beliefs that English is best taught in a monolingual classroom and that translanguaging will hinder their acquisition of English.

The discussion that ensued demonstrates how the airing of competing positions in a collaborative space enabled, over the period of the seminar, the development of the idea that the multilingual realities of migrants’ daily lives present a challenge to the dominant monolingualism of public, educational and policy discourse, and that space for translanguaging can be encouraged in ESOL classrooms.

Multilingual Realities of Everyday Lives

A position adopted by some seminar participants was one whereby ESOL practice should, in some respect, reflect the realities of their students’ lives. The everyday communicative experience of ESOL students can be complex, involving interaction with people from a range of linguistic backgrounds, and students’ lives are typically led multilingually. The point was made by one

participant about the ordinariness of multilingualism, the idea that it is unremarkable: 'I can say from my own experience and that of my siblings that moving between languages in daily life as children was never confusing, and in retrospect it added richness to our expression.' Participants reflected upon the way daily interaction carries on outside classrooms, and upon the repertoire of communicative resources that their students have to hand that might support their learning: 'Multilingual repertoires are certainly a reality for our learners and I think as language teachers, we should promote this as a valuable skill to possess.'

Arguments for '*English Only*'

In a seminar about translanguaging in ESOL pedagogy, it might be expected that participants will take a position against 'English Only'. However, opinions were not uniformly opposed to keeping languages separate in the classroom. For one participant the language separation standpoint is crucial for the development of fluency, which entails not relying on 'mental translation'. He described how he personally needed to stop 'the habit of mentally translating spoken Spanish into English' when learning Spanish: 'My fluency jumped a great deal once I overcame this hurdle in Spanish and Portuguese, and it takes a lot of practice.' Participants also invoked ideas of equity and level-playing-field fairness, in defence of an English-only classroom space. That is, if the use of languages other than the target language is allowed in classrooms where there are students with a variety of language backgrounds, there is a risk of excluding some students. Activities involving grouping students by language background to enable classroom communication in expert languages would, in the view of one participant, be divisive: 'You would have strong bonds made between those who share their own language(s) but a division between those who speak different languages.' Moreover, like many ESOL students themselves, some teachers fear that allowing other languages into pedagogy will restrict the already limited opportunities that students might have to practice English.

Resisting 'English Only'

Countering a monolingual view, to require multilingual groups of students who are learning English to only speak English in their classrooms is, in the opinion of one participant, 'neither helpful nor respectful.' For another, denial of multilingualism through the promotion of a monolingual classroom space is a concern because not acknowledging students as speakers of different languages 'creates a sort of belief of the superiority of English over other languages and the superiority of a native teacher over others. It creates a stigma of bilingualism and almost a feeling of disrespect towards other languages and cultures.' One teacher noted that the promotion of a pedagogy that involves students' drawing on their range of linguistic resources has an affective rationale: 'It is good for language learners to feel that they have valuable (other) language resources and experiences they can bring to the classroom and usefully share, even if they are struggling with English.' On a more

practical note, as one participant pithily put it, ‘I can’t see a place for a monolingual institution with monolingual practices in a multilingual world.’

Often stimulated by the initial discussant response, the debate had interesting and useful things to say about how a multilingual ESOL pedagogy might be employed, in an effort to contest the monolingualism of contemporary ESOL, or indeed simply to align with the notion that the teaching of English to adult migrants aims to develop their multilingual repertoires. ‘It does not seem to make sense anymore (if it ever did)’ said one participant, ‘to teach students monolingually how to be (more) multilingual.’

ESOL pedagogy can build on students’ multilingual language knowledge, though a teacher’s multilingual orientation towards ESOL pedagogy does not have to entail a great deal of other language use. Rather, as one teacher said, it involves ‘acknowledging that students know, and have a great deal of fluency in, other languages, and allowing them to draw on, talk about and use this.’ A pedagogy that reflects and supports students’ experience beyond the classroom walls will lead them to consider their communication in terms of the range of linguistic resources available in the local settings where students will inevitably meet languages other than English. How to connect these local realities to the development of competence in English was explored by one participant, a teacher who distinguished between the process of learning (which might be multilingual) and eventual production, possibly more monolingual: ‘Students might be asked to interview local residents, who they might share other languages with, or to photograph the linguistic landscape of their area, and then report back on their findings in English, in some format.’ The idea of moving from attention to a range of the linguistic repertoire towards greater attention on English as students gain competence and confidence, was advocated by another teacher who employs the use of students’ expert languages to support learning activities. For instance, she supports the selective use of multilingual techniques for pre-writing tasks, aiming for idea-generation, ‘which I have found to be beneficial and seem to enable learners to produce better work than they had done otherwise.’

Translanguaging Space, Translanguaging Stance

I now consider translanguaging pedagogical practices in more detail, and do so by bringing in the notion of stance. Stance is a dynamic evaluation of something (material or conceptual) achieved in ongoing interaction through communicative means (Jaffe, 2009). Teachers’ choice of content and material, their methods and techniques and their interactions with their students, together comprise a particular stance, towards teaching, learning and learners. A translanguaging stance might be seen in teachers who incorporate translanguaging into their pedagogy to create a translanguaging space, a social space created by and for translanguaging (Li, 2011; see also García & Li, 2014; Li, 2018). A translanguaging stance can involve more than confronting, in pedagogy, monolingual educational discourses with the multilingual reality. When people are allowed to use a rich range of communicative resources (including their expert languages) rather than being restricted to languages

in which they are less proficient, they are more able to negotiate and potentially extend their social identities. Valuing students' full communicative repertoires through the incorporation of translanguaging into pedagogy also involves encouraging students themselves to value those repertoires. A teacher in Scotland who is also a language researcher, put it like this on the forum:

For me translanguaging allows teachers to recalibrate the value of languages involved. If we want learners to be successful in their learning endeavours and value all their resources, they need to be able to see the value of all the things they can do with language(s).

Translanguaging balances the power we often see attached to certain languages by proposing that we value all the communicative repertoires that we can draw on.

She went on to suggest that since discussions of language and power are deeply connected to established language ideologies, translanguaging spaces enable the interrogation of language hierarchies. Another participant also considered the way translanguaging spaces might act as spaces for social justice and for redressing power imbalances, but also supposed that how this might operate in classrooms would be of prime concern for teachers: 'But what do these approaches look like "in practice"? And how successful are they (indeed, how do we define success)? And how can we find and develop empirical evidence across these contexts which can then be shared and adapted/added to/developed/critiqued?'

To end, therefore, I present three descriptions of practice where e-seminar participants – identified by name in this case – appear to be promoting the development of a translanguaging space, and in so doing are enacting their translanguaging stance. First Sheila Macdonald talks about how classes at her organisation, Beyond the Page⁴, are set up.

We work in a highly-participative model. We also have English-speaking and multilingual volunteers. So the group is highly diverse in fluency and literacy in English. [...] We find that by highlighting and valuing multilingual use, the monolingual English-speaking volunteers discover and begin to appreciate how complex the lives of migrant families are. This re-frames the position of the 'expert speaker' as they observe and experience women using more than one means of communication. The role of the English-speaking group member is to adapt her listening and speaking skills to improve communication – i.e. the focus and responsibility is on the whole group, and the idea of 'language learner' is shared. English speakers begin to develop skills of active listening and waiting whilst others process, and of clearer speech.

This is helpful modelling when other power imbalances are in play – for example, we have a Polish family support worker who finds it very difficult not to immediately translate for Polish women, who tend to rely heavily on her, whilst also showing impatience when others need longer to either get peer support in a home language or work it out in English.

Second, Pauline Moon describes how she supports adult students in their learning on an Art & Design course:

Development of language and literacy practices is an element of all my work with students [...]. Recently I have used multilingual activities in group sessions on 'Written and spoken reflection', the aims of which were to strengthen conceptualisations about reflection and to reflect in depth in talk and writing. The students are a mix of monolingual and multilingual language users.

1. I ask for a volunteer, willing to tell the group some of their reflective thoughts about an aspect of their current art/design project, and to respond to my probing questions. My questions aim to push the student to tell us more, in words, about the depth of their thinking [...].

2. I ask the other students to talk in pairs about what they noticed about the conversation between me and the student - and to do this in any language(s) [...].

3. I ask the pairs and the volunteer to feed back to the group. The feedback always includes (but is not limited to) how the volunteer used my probing questions to push their thinking deeper.

4. I ask students to get into threes and replicate the same activity: one person reflects; one is the probing questioner; one is an observer (then they switch roles). Students can do this in any language(s) they wish, and we sort the groups out accordingly [...].

Our common ground is that we're all trying to facilitate learning. In relation to students who often find it challenging to express their ideas in English, I think I have noticed that something seems to shift, after a student has used one of their expert languages in the activities. I've heard students talking more clearly, in more depth, and more freely in English. This is why I am interested in multilingual approaches – for me they are about facilitating and easing the learning process, inclusion, identity, claiming and using your voice.

Finally Dermot Bryers, one of the seminar's original discussants, describes a lesson at his own organisation, English for Action⁵, an example of critical translanguaging pedagogy in practice (described in detail in Cooke et al. 2019). Members of the class have chosen Discrimination on the basis of language use as their topic:

The issue of people being told to “speak English” in public places emerged because I proposed “languages” as a theme. Students discussed where they spoke their mother tongue (or other expert languages). One student said a friend of hers had been told to “speak English” while speaking Polish to her daughter in the supermarket. The following lesson I showed them a depiction of this story and we discussed it:



My students' stories of this were disturbing. I knew it went on, but one student said she suffers this nearly every day on the bus when she speaks to her relatives on the phone in Indonesian. The class was clear that it was about racism.

This is a mixed level group and my feeling is that we wouldn't have been able to have what felt like an important discussion without using students' other expert languages. The group discussion structured by my questions relating to the image above lasted around 25 minutes. One of the students spoke Spanish and one of my colleagues was able to support her with bits of translation during the discussion [...].

Did this help their acquisition of English? I guess it would be almost impossible to say. But having this discussion felt important. After the discussion the students shared their stories in small groups [...]. One student told us she had confronted a racist man on the bus and she shouted at him in a mix of English, French and Arabic. Apparently it worked. And she got a round of applause from the class-mates when she told the story. Hopefully some of my

students will be better equipped next time a bigot tells them not to speak their first (or 2nd, 3rd etc.) language. This would seem a good outcome from an ESOL class.

Conclusion

Teachers face challenges when they try to incorporate multilingualism into their teaching, and to adopt a translanguaging stance towards their practice: few are trained in techniques to do so and many are still told on teacher training programmes that ‘English Only’ in class is a tried and tested approach. This, as noted, aligns with a pervasive monolingualism in policy and public discourse. Interactions with practitioners such as those in the ESOL-Research e-seminar reported here, show conversely that the walls of ESOL classrooms need to be porous: that is, the multilingual concerns of students’ lives outside the classroom should closely inform the teaching and learning processes that happen inside. In other words, the purpose of ESOL students’ language education is to support their experience of life in a new social context.

This is not least because ESOL classrooms, as sites of multilingual engagement, are also very important sites where identity work is done, as e-seminar participants noted. Through providing translanguaging spaces, ESOL practice might enable students to challenge the limited set of identities imposed upon them by policy and institutionally: they might no longer simply be ‘student as potential employee’, ‘student as test taker’, or ‘student as aspirant legal citizen’. Indeed a transformative experience should be at the core of migrant language education: what use is it otherwise, if it does not relate to students’ concerns and their potential social exclusion in ways that challenge that?

Yet multilingual pedagogies which address the linguistic realities of adult migrant students have been conspicuously thin on the ground. Moreover, as Pöyhönen and colleagues (2018) note, ‘even as societies have become more diverse, the language policies which impinge upon adult migrants and their education are – with some exceptions – typically monolingual’ (Pöyhönen et al., 2018: 489). Political discourse with a bearing upon language education typically makes no reference to students’ multilingualism. Language testing regimes for adult migrants do not acknowledge either the multilingual challenges that students face outside class or the multilingual meaning-making resources that they might have to hand to meet those challenges. While the mutual engagement of ESOL researchers and practitioners that takes place within the Semiotic Social Space of the ESOL-Research forum shows that there can be a productive interaction between researchers and practitioners, engagement with policy actors about the benefits of multilingual pedagogy remains more elusive. Embedding multilingualism in practice at grassroots level, coupled with supporting teachers striving to adopt a translanguaging stance, remain the most hopeful ways of promoting multilingualism in ESOL policy.

Notes

1. Translation and Translanguaging: Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities (AH/L007096/1) (TLANG), funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The project was led by Professor Angela Creese, and involved teams in Birmingham, Leeds, Cardiff and London.

2. The homepage and archives of ESOL-Research are at www.jiscmail.ac.uk and the record of the seminar interaction is available in the archives from January to March 2017. I would like to acknowledge forum members for their responses to the issues raised in the seminar.

3. The Diasporic Adult Language Socialisation study (DALSS), funded by the Leverhulme Trust, was led by Professor Ben Rampton and Dr Lavanya Sankaram at King's College, London. The teacher-researchers on the associated ESOL project were Dermot Bryers, Becky Winstanley and Melanie Cooke. I would like to thank them very much for their contribution as discussants.

4. Beyond the Page, led by Sheila Macdonald, brings women from different backgrounds together to break down barriers of language and cultural differences. <http://www.beyondthepage.org.uk/>

5. English for Action London provides ESOL courses for adult migrants in London, and is based on Freirean principles of emancipatory pedagogy. <http://www.efalondon.org/>

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