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## A monolingual approach in an English primary school: practices and implications

Olena Gundarina<sup>a</sup>  and James Simpson<sup>\*b</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>The Language Centre, School of Languages, Cultures and Societies, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK; <sup>b</sup>School of Education, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

### ABSTRACT

This paper investigates a monolingual approach to the teaching of linguistic minority pupils in an English primary school at Key Stage Two (7–11 years old). The work is based on a longitudinal case study of one Russian-speaking migrant pupil and her schooled experience. The analysis and discussion explicate the prohibition of the first or home language (Russian) in the school, and reveal how denying a seven-year-old migrant child permission to use her L1 is detrimental to her learning experience and her well-being. The focal data derive from participant-observation fieldnotes, visual artefacts and interviews with the child, her mother, and a class teacher over a 7-month period. Through an analysis of the participants' stancetaking, we show how the pupil's voice is inaudible in her struggle against a monolingual attitude towards her bilingualism and multicompetence. Our contribution therefore builds on work in critical migrant language education, to identify the importance of enabling the presence of the L1 in learning for migrant pupils.

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### KEYWORDS

Home language; language ideology; linguistic minority; EAL; Russian-speaking migrant

## Introduction

In this article, we explore the tension between linguistic diversity – a feature of life in England's schools (Leung 2002) – and an ideology of monolingualism in education (Blackledge 2001). We do so with reference to our research with linguistic minority pupils in England, described in policy as having 'English as an Additional Language' (EAL). Our focus is the monolingual approach to the education of a Russian-speaking migrant pupil in Key Stage Two (primary-level schooling in England and Wales between 7 and 11 years old). Through our analysis of stancetaking (Jaffe 2009) in the interaction of three participants – the pupil, her mother and her teacher – we explicate the prohibition of the first or home language (L1) in school, and one pupil's associated experiences of this. The analysis enables insights into how a monolingual ideology, as articulated in national and institutional policy discourse, in school practice and in a teacher's talk, relates to the learning and the subjective well-being of one child. We understand the well-being of migrant children as their own 'holistic experience of schooling that includes overall perceptions of being at

**CONTACT** Olena Gundarina  [o.gundarina@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:o.gundarina@leeds.ac.uk)  The Language Centre, Parkinson Building, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK.

\*Present affiliation: Division of Humanities, Hong Kong University of Science & Technology, Clear Water Bay, Hong Kong.

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school in a resettlement country (...) that may or may not be related to academic achievement' (Due, Riggs, and Augoustinos 2014, 210 and 211), a definition which broadly aligns with the UK Government Department of Health and Social Care interpretation of subjective well-being as 'individual perceptions' (DHSC. 2013).

The positive impact of linguistic minority pupils' use of their first or home language(s) (L1) upon aspects of their learning and schooled experience in L2 contexts is frequently highlighted in the research literature (e.g. Chalmers et al. 2019; Liu and Evans 2016; Slembrouck, Van Avermaet, and Van Gorp 2018; Van Avermaet et al. 2018). In educational policy and in EAL practice, however, this potential is not fully realised. In part, this is due to the complexity of EALs 'invisible', 'understated', 'consistently inconsistent' status (Costley 2014, 289), and a lack of clear structured guidance for EAL support and provision: EAL is uncoordinated at national scale, and schools are left to develop local practices in isolation from each other (Sharples 2016). Educational provision for linguistic minority pupils in schools in England is also an arena where institutional and national-level language ideologies of monolingualism (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998; Simpson, 2015) pertain, and where the use of languages other than English (i.e. pupils' L1s) can be discouraged.

The contribution of this paper to the body of research on linguistic minority pupils' home languages in education is to examine how the ideologically-informed prohibition of the L1 is implemented in institutional educational practice (and in a teacher's talk about their practice), and how Katerina (a pseudonym), a Russian-speaking migrant pupil, and her mother respond. Our discussion highlights how a lack of attention to migration and language in a school affects the well-being of children from migration backgrounds. We provide recommendations for EAL and policy professionals, which may be applicable to contexts worldwide which have both monolingualising or assimilationist policy orientations and large numbers of migrant children.

## EAL

In the UK, EAL – English as an Additional Language – broadly refers to individuals younger than 16 years old who have migrated with their family and are immersed in life in a new country, emphasising that these children's first or dominant language (L1) is different from the *de facto* national language of the country (L2, English). We acknowledge that the terminology is problematic. In the UK Government Department for Education terms (DfE 2017, 10):

A pupil is recorded to have English as an additional language if they are exposed to a language at home that is known or believed to be other than English. This is not a measure of English language proficiency or a good proxy for recent immigration.

This definition is somewhat broader than our own, as it applies to all pupils 'exposed to a language at home' that is not English, who might or might not be migrants. The term 'EAL' needs to be used with caution, and we are mindful of its inherent vagueness (Cunningham 2017): for instance, 'Additional' connotes the adding of languages rather than syncretism, i.e. dynamic uniting of languages. The label also overlooks contextual nuances between recent arrivals (first-generation immigrants), and pupils born in the UK to parents who were migrants, and who are speakers of languages other than English. Moreover, as the DfE definition hints, in some UK contexts – for instance in Wales or Scotland – most

linguistic minority speakers of Welsh or Scots Gaelic are not migrants or the children of migrants at all. Finally, the static understandings of ‘EAL’, ‘L1’ and ‘L2’ do not do justice to the complex nature of communicative practice on the ground, as we explain later.

### Practices and policies on home language use in schools

Attitudes and approaches towards L1 use in schools differ widely across contexts, ranging from prohibition to tacit acceptance. Among high school students in the UK, Safford and Costley (2008) found that pupils’ multilingual resources were ignored and/or discounted. Pupils in Dakin’s (2017) study received minimal L1 support: L1 use in school was ‘neither encouraged nor discouraged but relied on the attitudes of individual teachers to promote and value it’ (432). Teachers saw L1 use as a way of improving the L2 (i.e. they relied on L1 to support the learning of English) but not as an important facet of well-being (resulting in linguistic isolation) or cognitive development (overlooking the cognitive benefits of bilingualism). Strobbe et al. (2017) study of attitudes towards L1 use in schools in Flanders identified a tendency towards control of language use and a wish to increase the presence of the dominant language. A similar deficit view of bilingualism in the UK motivates a push by school managers for EAL support (Bourne 2007), with an emphasis on English. Likewise, Bonacina-Pugh (2020), working with newly-arrived immigrant children in France, showed how a particular language was valued over others through claims of appropriateness to context. All these findings run counter to the recommendations of Liu and Evans (2016), who suggest that school language policies be developed where multilingualism can become a ‘mediating cultural tool to empower individuals,’ making a difference ‘as a social norm in a super-diverse society’ (565).

Denial of the importance of the L1 in schools in England is unsurprising, however, when at macro policy level, neither L1s nor EAL pupils are afforded a great deal of recognition (Leung 2005, 2016; Wardman 2013). While there is no specific national policy in relation to EAL, the current National Curriculum in England (DfE 2013) acknowledges that the needs of EAL pupils should be considered by teachers in order to ‘develop their English,’ assuming that English alone is needed to achieve inclusion and equal opportunity aims in order to ‘provide the support pupils need to take part in all subjects’ (8). In the National Curriculum, the English Language is located at the heart of education, accepted without question to be ‘essential to participating fully as a member of society; pupils, therefore, who do not learn to speak, read and write fluently and confidently are effectively disenfranchised’ (13). This echoes the ‘English as a subject’ position of the 1980s, part of a neoliberal agenda which advocated English literacy as a ‘basic competence necessary in a competitive global economy’ (Goodwyn 2014, 28).

This is also consistent with the powerful ideology of monolingualism and homogeneity that dominates in education policy in England (Blackledge 2001; Costley 2014) and indeed in public and political discourse about linguistic diversity more generally (Cooke and Simpson 2012). A language ideology is a set of ideas about the nature of language in the world, deployed as a rationalisation or justification of language use (Irvine 1989; Silverstein 1979). The monolingualist ideology informing current education policy discourse in England leads to schools and teachers being communicated contradictory statements by the Government to ‘celebrate the diversity represented by their pupils, but measure their success only in terms of their attainment in English’ (Conteh, Martin, and Robertson 2007,

15). These ‘conflicting paradigms’ (Conteh 2012, 101) in English policy structure (‘celebrating the diversity’ while in practice imposing monolingualism, disregarding pupils’ linguistic repertoires and their benefits) are exacerbated by an absence of policy strategy and direct funding from the Department for Education (NALDIC, n.d.) and (in a recent move) the removal of specific attention from the inspectorate to support EAL pupils (NALDIC 2021). This prompts schools to adopt their own locally-developed student-focused policies and strategies to meet pupil needs, generating the picture of disparate practices, deviating from evidence-based recommendations (cf. Cushing 2020; Wardman 2013).

### The significance of home languages for learning and well-being

At odds with the monolingualising tendencies of policy and much practice, evidence-based research illustrates that the multiple languages of migrant children are significant in most areas of their experience (Mantovani and Martini 2008; McEachron and Bhatti 2005). While particular (and different) languages might dominate at home and at school, children’s everyday communicative practice is translanguaging, i.e. they deploy their linguistic and other communicative repertoires holistically and flexibly, as linguistically multi-competent people (Cook and Wei 2016). This is salient for primary migrant pupils in view of the cross-curricular nature of language learning in schools (Cummins 2018) in the context of immersion, or mainstreaming, which – as noted – frequently downplays or even rejects multilingualism (Van Der Wildt, Van Avermaet, and Van Houtte 2017).

A growing body of research advocates bi- and multi-literacy in education to support aspects of pupil achievement, cognitive enhancement, L2 development (Ball 2011; García 2009), and subjective well-being. Subjective well-being comprises individuals’ feelings or perceptions about their life (DHSC. 2013; Diener, Lucas, and Oishi 2018). In a systematic scoping review article (Müller et al. 2020), migrant child subjective well-being was found to be positively impacted by bilingualism (using and developing two languages), rather than by using only the majority language or L1, e.g. by reducing emotional stress or increasing linguistic adaptation and psychosocial adjustment (Portes and Hao 2002). Focusing on psychiatric and psychosomatic symptoms among 320 Finnish-Swedish migrant children, Vuorenkoski et al. (2000) found that migrant children who experienced a language shift (i.e. did not use two languages after migration) were in the risk group and showed higher level of vulnerability, compared with children who consistently used two languages after migration.

In her ethnographic study of Chinese-speaking EAL pupils in English schools, Chen (2009) describes three prerequisites for inclusion and effective support of emergent bilinguals in English classrooms: children should feel that their L1 makes a contribution in lessons, that they have opportunities to interact in the L1 in lessons, and that the generic aim of lessons is ‘to make [children] bilingual and bicultural’ (57). Chen (2009) concludes, in relation to well-being and achievement, that a positive attitude towards the L1s and cultures of pupils, one which protects an untroubled learning, is fundamental for their success and high self-esteem. This echoes Cummins (2001) equation of refusing children access to their L1 with not recognising their identity. The importance of L1 learning for educational effectiveness more generally, in contexts where an

L2 dominates, is well-established. In a paper commissioned by UNESCO, Ball (2011, 57) notes that:

Children's L1 is important for their overall language and cognitive development and their academic achievement; if children are growing up with one language, educational provisions need to support them in becoming highly proficient in that language before engaging in academic work in L2.

Similarly, Liu et al. (2017, 380), in research conducted on effective multilingual pedagogy in England, acknowledge the importance of the L1 in learning as 'an essential stepping stone to accessing the curriculum'. The use of L1 is thus essential for children in two ways: as the foundation of support for learning (and learning in) the L2 (English in England's schools); and as an integral aspect of their subjective well-being, achievement and developing identity.

There is evidently a problematic disjuncture between monolingualist policies (formed at macro level and articulated at meso or institutional level) and a research evidence base which indicates the importance of valuing L1 use in schools, not least for the subjective well-being of multilingual pupils. This article links the problem to the situated experience of a migrant pupil immersed in a L2 school environment. Like Gal (1998), we maintain that studying language data through the lens of language ideology illuminates unanticipated connections and debates among participants. Moreover, such consideration helps with 'the integration of what, in more traditional terms, would seem to be different "levels" of social phenomena (e.g. macropolitical and microinteractional)' (318). Through our examination of participants' stancetaking and its relation to ideology, we explore EAL practices in a primary school, how they maintain and reproduce a discourse that promotes monolingualism, and the implications for the learning experience of migrant pupils. We achieve this through addressing the questions:

1. How does the communicative practice of a teacher, a migrant pupil and a parent enact their stances towards the use of pupils' L1 in school?
2. How are these stances reflective of and constitutive of the participants' ideological positions?

### Methodology and analytical approach

This paper develops work carried out by Gundarina (2020), a qualitative multi-case study (Yin 2014) of the experiences of Russian-speaking migrant pupils in English primary schools. Our participant, Katerina (pseudonym), was one of five purposively selected (Dörnyei 2007) according to the criteria of being a migrant child who arrived not more than six years ago, who is studying in Key Stage 2, who speaks Russian as their L1, and whose parents/carers are Russian native speakers. A 'snowball' strategy (Seidman 2013) was used to recruit participants, by posting advertisements on online social networks. Through one such post, Katerina's mother expressed her interest in participating. We first gained permission to work with Katerina's school via the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), then obtained informed consent from Katerina, her parents, and her class teacher.

The data were collected by the first author following institutional ethical approval and a Disclosure and Barring Service check. She visited the school regularly from October 2016 until May 2017. Data analysed for this paper comprise individual interviews with the three

**Table 1.** Data sources.

Method	Number	Duration	Average	Format
Semi-structured individual interviews with Katerina	13	6h38m	32 m	Audio-recorded
Open-ended individual interviews with mother and teacher	2 (parent) 1 (teacher)	4h18m	1h26m	Audio-recorded
Participant-observations and fieldnotes	24 days	7 months	4 days per month	Typed on an iPad

participants (Katerina, her teacher and her mother) and unstructured participant-observations of Katerina's school experiences (see Table 1), including her non-verbal and verbal behaviours, people involved, date, time, lesson type, number of pupils in the room, roles of the people, the flow of the lessons, situations, interactions, and perceptions. Participant observations also included chance conversations with the teachers, school staff and parents.

The interviews with Katerina and her mother were conducted in Russian. For a detailed discussion on the use of L1 in the interviews and researcher reflexivity, see Gundarina (2020). The second author's role was to advise on data generation, and contribute to data analysis and the writing of this paper. The study employed methodological triangulation, drawing upon multiple sources of data (King and Horrocks 2010), prolonged engagement and member-checking trustworthiness strategies (Creswell 2018). The preliminary analysis of the interviews was member-checked with the participant's mother during the second interview.

### Data analysis

The analysis for this paper was in two stages. The initial thematic analysis to identify relevant issues in Katerina's schooled experience was followed by a sociolinguistic analysis of stancetaking in the interaction of the three participants. The initial analysis was guided by the principle of fitness for purpose (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2018, 347). The broad purpose was to understand, describe and interpret Katerina's experiences in her school. The data were transcribed verbatim, and anonymised, complying with British Educational Research Association guidelines (BERA 2018). They were then organised and coded with the support of the QDA tool NVivo 11 (QSR International Ltd.). The process of coding was a non-linear, iterative, and long-term, involving repeated reading of the transcripts, writing initial codes on NVivo, assigning a relevant code (or *meaningful summary*) to an abstract transcript and multiple revision. We identified frequently occurring codes (e.g. Katerina's feelings about her schools), codes which were important for other elements (e.g. explaining other data); and 'rare and influential', contradictory and unexpected codes (LeCompte and Schensul 2010, 203), such as those related to the use of L1 in the L2 school, the most salient theme for this paper. Silences and non-verbal responses were also considered (Creswell 2012). For example, Katerina's drawing of a flying L1-speaking horse was coded by highlighting a relevant segment and assigning an underlying meaning to it (code) under the same theme.

We then brought together data on the theme of L1 use as it was experienced in Katerina's case and analysed focal extracts with attention to participants' stancetaking in interaction. Stancetaking is the means through which people connect their communicative behaviour to broader social meanings and social life. The analysis aims to provide enriched understanding of that communicative behaviour and interaction in relation to policy discourses

about EAL (and their ideological underpinnings) in a school setting where migrant children typically find themselves. In the discussion afterwards, we relate the findings to pupils' subjective well-being, as described in our survey of the literature above. Sociolinguistic studies of stance – which is a fundamental property of communication (Johnstone 2009; Ochs 1992) – identify it as a dynamic evaluation of something (material or conceptual) achieved in ongoing interaction (Jaffe 2009). We examine how the three participants' communicative actions (in their talk during semi-structured and open-ended interviews, and – in Katerina's case informal classroom talk with the researcher and a drawing) enact their stance towards the use of the L1 in school. Three types of stancetaking are prominent in the focal data (and hence are the focus of our analysis): positioning, evaluation and hedging. The lexico-grammatical markers of stance we examine correspond with these strategies: pronoun use, in relation to positioning; lexical choice, indicating evaluation; and grammatical constructions (e.g. conditionals) which function as hedges. The recorded spoken data are transcribed using a simplified version of conventions developed by Jefferson as summarised by Holt and Clift (2007) (see [Appendix 1](#)); we include some paralinguistic detail in this modified verbatim transcription to allow readers to gain a sense of how utterances were made during the interviews with the three participants (see [Table 1](#)).

We begin with a general outline of the case, including L1 context, before moving to the analysis of the participants' stancetaking in turn: the class teacher, Katerina, and her mother.

## The case of Katerina

### *The research setting*

Katerina is a Year Three pupil from Russia, who attends an English state-funded primary school. It is a mixed gender school, evaluated as 'good' by Ofsted.<sup>1</sup> At the time of the study, the school had 114 (69.1%) EAP pupils (Gov.uk 2016). Katerina was seven years old at the start of the data collection period, having already spent three years in the UK. Prior to arrival in the UK she had no experience of school, or knowledge of English. Katerina and the researcher (the first author) developed a good relationship, Katerina being talkative and cheerful when with her. While observing in lessons at school, the researcher sat next to or behind Katerina, enabling her to watch and listen to her closely. She was allowed to speak to Katerina, taking part in activities, and moving around as necessary.

It became clear during the observation period, confirmed through later thematic analysis, that Katerina's bilingualism was a salient issue for the educational professionals in the school. The researcher and Katerina communicated in Russian at the outset. After a month of observations, the researcher received an e-mail from the school's SENCO:

1. I understand that at times you speak Russian with Katerina.
2. We encourage children to speak English whilst in school
3. and would only want Katerina to use her first language
4. when she really doesn't understand the concept explained
5. in English. When you're in next, it would be helpful to
6. discuss with [teacher] the circumstances in which you might
7. speak Russian with Katerina.



**Extract 1 Email from SENCO, 31/10/2016**

The SENCO writes on behalf of the school, shifting from first person singular *I* in (line 1) to first person plural *We* (line 2). She explains the limits on Katerina's use of Russian (line 4: *when she really doesn't understand the concept*), and invites the researcher to discuss with the teacher the circumstances under which she and Katerina might speak Russian (5-7). By communicating the constraints on the L1 use, the SENCO is enforcing a local institutional policy which aligns with the monolingualism evident in national policy discourse, as articulated for instance in the National Curriculum (see section on practices and policies above). Now we explore how this monolingualist position is evident – though contested – in the stance that the teacher takes towards Katerina's use of a language other than English at school.

**Teacher: upholding a monolingual environment**

When the researcher and the teacher discussed allowing Russian, they agreed that its use should be restricted to the researcher's interviews with Katerina. The rationale offered by the teacher was that 'if anything happened then none of the adults would be able to help' (fieldnotes, recorded verbatim). The researcher was given no further explanation, though she gained a sense that this decision was based on the teacher wanting to understand the talk between Katerina and the researcher. Requiring the acquiescence of the school to collect data, the researcher agreed not to use Russian with Katerina during lessons. The researcher's fieldnotes also record instances when the prohibition was enforced. Extract 2 comments on how the teacher and teaching assistant (TA) had been discussing Katerina's use of Russian with a new pupil, a girl from Bulgaria. The teacher then says that he would tell Katerina to speak 'only [with emphasis] in English':

1. It appeared the school would not allow the use of the L1
2. even for newcomers who are also completely new to English
3. such as the girl from Bulgaria. At around the same time
4. the teacher told Katerina that if she spoke Russian
5. again her name would go on the board, a form of
6. discipline resulting in a shorter break and the
7. deduction of reward points. From this point on
8. Katerina would obey the rule when speaking aloud.

**Extract 2 Fieldnotes, 3/02/2017**

This command would be enforced through a disciplinary act (line 5), thus controlling Katerina's explicit use of Russian (7-8).

In his interview talk, however, the teacher appears ambivalent towards Katerina's use of Russian. Here we see, through an examination of markers of stance, how he conflates Katerina's cognitive ability with her language use.

1. I did a bit of EAL stuff
2. when I was at Uni (.) so I know ( ) about
3. BICS and CALPS (.) and I ↓think she is
4. a good example of one of those (.)

5. she's got the (.) she's got the social side
6. and she's got the basic language of learning
7. but actually that deep cognitive learning (.)
8. she hasn't got and I would be interested to see (.)
9. if I gave her the same activity (.)
10. Maths is a good example (.)
11. if I gave her an activity to do in Russian
12. would she do better than she is in English
13. like would she that actually do a difference
14. in her learning

**Extract 3 Interview with teacher, 4/11/2016**

In 1–3 he positions himself as a knowledgeable professional, citing his EAL training and his understanding of the continuum of L2 proficiency development elaborated by Cummins (1984): conversational fluency (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and the use of language in decontextualised academic situations (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). He talks about Katerina's English in terms of what she has and has not *got*: it is adequate for social purposes (5) and understanding classroom instructions (6). His use of *got* in (8) relates not to language but to learning, as he attributes her lack of academic ability to a cognitive issue. Through a series of conditional constructions (*would/if/if/would/would*, 8–13) he then speculates whether she would be able to perform academically (12) or develop cognitively (13) if she was allowed to use Russian. There is a hint therefore that the teacher understands language, cognitive development, and the learning environment to be intertwined.

In other interviews, however, his position is more firmly oriented towards the value of exposure to English in the learning process. The researcher asks the teacher about his classroom policy of organising pupils by ability (1–3):

1. R: do you divide by ability (.)
2. do you have tables in the ↑class
3. T: ↓yes (.) so this table is the BFGs
4. so I give them the group names
5. so that they don't know
6. but these are my lower children (.) yeah
7. R: so (.) she is on the lowest table
8. T: so we do that for writing reading and maths
9. but the creative curriculum thing (.)
10. like all the art this afternoon
11. that is in mixed group (.) and I am trying (.)
12. so with Katerina's group (.)
13. she deliberately has [name] (.)
14. who is a really good model of English
15. so she'd getting some good language in there (.)
16. [name] ( ) you haven't met ↑yet is (.) really chatty ((5 lines omitted))
17. T: so I deliberately do it (.) so I try to make sure

18. they have a good model of English (.)
19. and it's also he is very intelligent (.)
20. he is very able whereas I know she isn't

#### **Extract 4 Interview with teacher, 4/11/2016**

The teacher's overall position is that with further, greater exposure to appropriate models of English, Katerina would benefit academically, and he invokes the evaluative notion of an English user who provides a 'good model' of the language. He explains how he physically places pupils, some (Katerina included) being of a lower ability and thus – as the researcher notes – on 'the lowest table' (6-7). For arts-based activities ('the creative curriculum thing') however, the children are placed in mixed ability groups (11), and Katerina is seated next to a boy 'who is a really good model of English.' The 'good model' that this boy provides relates both to the quality of language, in terms of variety or sophistication (15), and to quantity (16). A little later, he again stresses that Katerina and other students need exposure to a 'good model of English' before positioning the boy as intelligent (24-25) in contrast to Katerina (25) 'whereas I know she isn't'. Thus he displays in his talk his alignment with the dominant discourse of the National Curriculum – English is crucial for learning – and at the same time conflates Katerina's cognitive ability with her lack of ability in English and, consequently, her need for the 'good model' provided by an intelligent, chatty boy.

#### **Katerina: Learning, language and well-being**

In their first interview, the researcher asked Katerina how she felt being Russian in school:

1. R. How do you feel being Russian ((K. continues reading))
2. being Russian in your ↑school ↑Why
3. K. ↓Плохо (.) Ругают часто (.) когда я говорю по-русски
4. ((↓Bad (.) [I] get scolded a lot (.) when I speak Russian))

#### **Extract 5 Interview with Katerina, 20/10/2016**

Negotiating her linguistic identity (Cummins 2001; Evans and Liu 2018), she equates being Russian to speaking Russian, and its prohibition and the subsequent scolding. Katerina's unhappiness at being forbidden to speak Russian is evident in the next extract, where she describes her drawing of her dream (Figure 1).

The drawing is of a horse that flies to school and, as Katerina says, 'speaks Russian' and 'она говорит: "залезай мне на ↑спину ↑↑ "Мы прокатаемся до школы"' ((*it says [to Katerina], "climb onto my ↑back ↑↑ We will ride to school"*)). A flying and speaking horse is a familiar figure in children's imagery, and in this case (following Kalvaitis and Monhardt 2012), it possibly shows her positive relationship with nature. Its destination (the L2 school) and its linguistic abilities (speaking Katerina's L1) are more significant. The winged horse Pegasus, a heroic creature from Greek mythology, is a familiar symbol in poetry therapy (see Rojcewicz 2020). From that perspective, it may be that Katerina portrays the horse as a means of transport, bringing the L1 to her school. As she says in the accompanying interview, 'Я обожаю говорить по-русски' ((*I adore speaking Russian*)).



**Figure 1.** A horse that speaks Russian.

A clear indication of her stance in relation to Russian and English at school is her insistence upon using Russian and her denial that she can understand the researcher when communication is in English (extract 6, from fieldnotes):

1. when I talk to her in English she says
2. that she does not understand me.
3. I explain two more times in English and she says
4. 'Я не понимаю.' 'I don't understand you' ((in Russian))

**Extract 6 Fieldnotes, 4/11/2016**

Katerina's persistent use of Russian in lessons (despite a well-founded fear of punishment) also signals a genuine lack of comprehension of classroom instructions given in English. Here, also from the fieldnotes, is one of many instances where she asks the researcher for help to explain or paraphrase in L1:

1. In one lesson Katerina asks me, 'Olena,
2. помоги помоги помоги помоги помоги!'
3. 'Olena, help help help help help!'
4. I help. In that task Katerina does not understand
5. what is required of her at all.
6. After I have helped her, she rushes to take another task.
7. Before leaving Katerina hugs me and says,
8. 'Я люблю тебя' 'I love you'.

**Extract 7 Fieldnotes, 02/02/2017**

The researcher's interpretation of Katerina's plea for help in Russian (2) is that she has not understood the instructions for the tasks in English (4-5). She then describes how Katerina says 'I love you' (8) after receiving the necessary support, expressing both her appreciation and her alignment with the researcher. Katerina here is in a double-bind. Being unable to understand the activity is a source of worry for her, as seen from her pleas for help (2-3). The only way she has of accessing it, however, is to call on the researcher for assistance using Russian. Yet by using Russian she also risks incurring punishment, a further source of worry (see extracts 2 and 5).

Katerina adopts a negative stance towards her learning of English, as evident in this extract, where she associates its use with boredom:

1. R. Тебе нравится изучать английский
2. ((do you like learning English))
3. K. эээээ (.)↓нет
4. ((ehhhh (.) ↓no))
5. R. ↑Почему
6. ((↑why))
7. K. \$↓Надоело\$
8. ((\$↓bored\$))
9. R. А почему надоело, как ты думаешь (.)
10. ((why are you bored do you think))
11. K. Может быть (.) потому что я с ним много
12. слишком ↑много разговариваю
13. ((maybe because I speak it too ↑much))

**Extract 8 Interview with Katerina, 3/11/2016**

Her response to the question of whether she likes learning English (1) is a brief 'нет' (3, 'no'), and her explanation is simply 'надоело' (7, 'bored'). When pushed, she suggests that she speaks it 'много слишком' (11-13, 'too much'). So feelings about using Russian, and boredom associated with the use of English, contribute to her lack of enjoyment of school, a consistent theme in her talk (observations in November 2016; February, March and May 2017). Extract 9, from May 2017, is a typical example giving an insight into her feelings about school:

1. R. Тебе нравится школа
2. ((do you like school))
3. K. Нет
4. ((↓no))
5. R. Почему
6. ((why not))
7. K. Да иногда только (.)
8. ((yes only sometimes (.)))
9. R. Иногда ↑да
10. ((sometimes ↑yes))
11. K. Когда ты приходишь (.) Больше никогда
12. ((when you come (.) no other time))

**Extract 9 Interview with Katerina, 22/05/2017**

When asked if she likes school, she replies 'Нет' (3-4, 'no'). Her response to the probe 'Почему' (5-6, 'why not') is to indicate her closeness to the researcher (7-12).

We have identified a number of features of Katerina's interaction which indicate her stance towards language, and constraints upon its use, at school: her repeated statements about her dislike of learning English; her reliance upon, but simultaneous fear of punishment for using, Russian; her awareness of her teacher's view of her abilities; and her stated dislike of school. We suggest that these factors are inter-related and that in combination they have a deleterious effect on her well-being, further discussed below. Now, having established the school's locally-developed and enacted prohibition of the L1, and Katerina's response to, and resistance of, this, we examine Katerina's mother's view.

**Mother: Resisting deficit labelling**

Katerina's mother's stance towards language use in school is evident in a discussion she had with the researcher where she describes an event which took place approximately six months prior to the start of the fieldwork. The mother explains how the research began at the point when she and Katerina had encountered a problem that the school wished to list Katerina as a student with special educational needs:

1. что как раз у нас была проблема вот эта (.)
2. что Катерину хотели в disabled educational list
3. Поставить (.) что она как раз тогда сезон тестов начался (.)
4. когда ( ) дети проходили тесты и по результатам этого
5. теста определяли результат школы (.) Катерину хотели
6. записать в список детей которые трудно
7. ну с проблемами
8. ((we just had a problem (.) they wanted to put Katerina
9. on the disabled educational list (.) it was then that
10. the test season began ( ) when children passed tests
11. and the results of the school were determined by the
12. results of this test (.) they wanted to shove Katerina
13. to the list of children who are difficult well
14. with problems))

**Extract 10 Interview with mother, 03/11/2016**

The mother makes reference to the school's wish to put Katerina on a 'disabled educational list' (2-3). She refers to a test (3-4), most likely the SATS test taken by pupils at the end of Key Stage 1, when they are seven years old. As the interview progresses, the mother becomes firmer in stating her opposition to this move by the school: the verb *поставить* (*put*) in (3) becomes *записать* (*shove*) (6), something to be discarded. Thus she positions herself in opposition to the school, which considers her child as having educational problems.

She reports taking action in response to the school's move, requesting a psychological assessment of her daughter. Katerina was assessed in school by the SENCO; her mother

said (interview, 22/05/2017): ‘у нее не выявили никаких проблем (.) educational issues (.) Никаких↓нет (.) Кроме того (.) что (.) вот (.) понимание языка’ (‘they didn’t find any problems (.) educational issues (.) There were ↓none (.) except for the understanding of the language’). As the interview continues, Katerina’s mother describes Katerina’s educational issues concerning language and in relation to the results of the test:

1. например (.) ей дают (.) она читает задание (.)
2. она не понимает (.)
3. она не знает (.) как делать (.)
4. как только ей задания перефразируют
5. на более легкий язык (.) все (.) она понимает
6. все (.) заключения больше никакого не было
7. ((for instance (.) she is given (.) she reads tasks (.)
8. she doesn’t understand (.)
9. she doesn’t know (.) what to do (.)
10. as soon as these tasks are paraphrased for her
11. using easier language (.) that’s it (.) she understands
12. everything (.) that is all (.) there was nothing else
13. in the summary of the assessment))

#### **Extract 11 Interview with mother, 03/11/2016**

The mother maintains that Katerina has no non-language educational issues. In (1–2) she explains that Katerina does not understand classroom instructions unless they are paraphrased using easier language. Aligning with the results of the SENCO’s assessment, she maintains that if easier language is used, ‘Она понимает’ (5), ‘she understands’. We might compare this position with the teacher’s view of Katerina’s difficulties, as expressed in extract 3, as being language-related. His tentative view is that if she was allowed to carry out some tasks in Russian, her academic performance might improve. Katerina’s mother does not advocate this; rather, she suggests that the use of simplified classroom language would enable her daughter to understand what is expected of her and hence to perform better.

## **Discussion**

This paper seeks to understand how the communicative practice of a teacher, a migrant pupil and a parent enact their stances towards pupils’ language use in school, and how these stances are reflective and constitutive of the participants’ ideological positions. Katerina’s experience offers insight into how language ideologies are shaped and maintained in practice: in Blommaert’s (1999, 1) terms how they are *articulated*, *formed*, *amended* and *enforced*. In Katerina’s case, the email from the SENCO is an articulation of the school’s position on the use of the L1 in formal learning contexts (‘We encourage children to speak English whilst in school’). This is consistent with the way English is viewed vis-à-vis other languages in educational policy, as evident in the National Curriculum, and in political rhetoric and public discourse in England generally, as discussed earlier. Calls for migrants to use English indicate the common understanding that one language must stand above others in the public sphere. The teacher, when upholding

the ban on the use of Russian in class, *forms* this monolingualist ideology in practice. That is, he requires Katerina's linguistic behaviour to align with the school's position on the use of English. There is some *amendment* at the local level: he allows the use of the L1 in a controlled way, e.g. in interviews with the researcher. But there is also *enforcement*: Katerina is punished for using Russian in class.

Alternative ways of considering the L1 were not available to Katerina. Russian was not seen as a mediational empowering tool (Liu and Evans 2016), nor was its potential use viewed as a way of supporting L2 development (Dakin 2017). It was a hurdle and a threat, enacting the 'language as a problem' orientation towards bilingualism (Baker and Wright 2017, 10; Bourne 2007) and a deficit view of pupils' linguistic resources (Wielgosz and Molyneux 2015). In the 'practiced language policy' of the institution and the classroom (Bonacina-Pugh 2012) Katerina's L1 was seen as neither appropriate nor legitimate. Indeed the stance towards Katerina's home language is redolent of what Gal (1998) refers to as a semiotic process of ideological erasure, occurring when an ideology focuses its attention on one aspect of a soci-olinguistic field, 'thereby rendering some linguistic forms or groups invisible or recasting the image of their presence and practices to better fit the ideology' (318).

The teacher did suggest that he was aware of the potential of the L1 to support learning, when he speculated whether Katerina's performance in maths might improve were she allowed to use Russian. On the whole, however, her low achievement was accounted for institutionally with reference to internal factors, her lack of intelligence and ability, to the extent that she was to be placed on the 'disabled educational list' (to quote her mother). This runs contrary to Government guidelines on Special Educational Needs and Disability, which state clearly that 'Difficulties related solely to learning English as an additional language are not SEN'. (2015). Researchers and practitioners have for many years been conscious not to elide the two (Cline 1995).

By examining the positioning of the participants, we have demonstrated how monolingualist beliefs, a misunderstanding of emergent bilingualism, and low academic expectations negatively impact on one child's learning and subjective well-being. The absence of formal bilingual education, coupled with the dominant use of the L1 at home, implies disadvantage in terms of subjective well-being (Müller et al. 2020; Portes and Hao 2002), academic achievement, preventing access to the curriculum (Liu et al. 2017) and cognitive development (Lauchlan, Parisi, and Fadda 2013). Using one language after migration was found to link with increased vulnerability, as opposed to children who used two languages post-migration (Vuorenkoski et al. 2000). Practitioners in Katerina's school identified achievement and cognitive issues, but without supposing that these might have originated from a refusal to admit the L1. Moreover, Katerina's linguistic safety, which would have been encouraged had she been seen as an 'important learner' as a bilingual in class (Gregory 1994, 153), was instead compromised through punishing her use of the L1, as evident in her unhappiness.

Arguments for the inclusion of the L1 in the learning process for migrant children, and allowing them access to their multilingual resources (Safford and Costley 2008), abound. Liu et al. (2017) demonstrate that the explicit use of the L1 for new arrivals who are new to English is an aspect of productive pedagogy in multilingual classrooms. The incorporation of both languages, through bilingual (Conteh and Riasat 2014) or translanguaging pedagogy (García, Seltzer, and Witt 2018), coupled with raising linguistic awareness among teachers, might have enabled Katerina to feel safe, and to access materials and activities. Consequentially,



the issues in learning identified by the teacher might not have pertained. While there is no one recipe, what our findings imply for a range of stakeholders is a fundamental reorientation in policy and practice. The study's implications are that to aid children's learning and well-being, primary education policy might:

- Acknowledge access to the L1 by migrant children as an unconditional linguistic human right.
- Encourage schools and practitioners to incorporate the L1 in the learning process for migrant children as a valuable resource.
- Communicate to practitioners that emergent bilingualism is an asset, and the L1 is a foundation for children's learning and their well-being.

For classroom practice we recommend that practitioners:

- Treat migrant children's L1 as a valuable resource, essential for their well-being, learning, and identity development.
- Allow children access to their multilingual resources and their full linguistic repertoire for the purposes of learning.
- Increase the opportunities for pupils to use their L1s, for example by:
  - Introducing an 'L1 space' whereby pupils could learn their L1s.
  - Being ready to 'disrupt one language space' policy (e.g. by using 'translanguaging lifesaver rings') to ensure that children understand the content of the lesson (García et al., 2018, 44).
  - Enabling children to brainstorm ideas in any language and then share them in L2 (and vice versa).
  - Encouraging flexible use of a bilingual dictionary (or Google Translate), which should be made available for children to use.
- Use resources to support EAL children developed by NALDIC. (2015), The Bell Foundation (2021), and García et al. (2018) which offer many other such possibilities.

Teaching methods that draw upon creative inquiry also afford opportunities to challenge monolingualist assumptions in primary education. Fashanu, Wood, and Payne (2020), for example, use a 'language portraits' technique (Busch 2018) to explore multilingual primary school pupils' communicative repertoires, redolent of Katerina's flying horse drawing.

## Conclusion

Hohti (2016, 87) stresses the importance of 'listen[ing] to those voices that usually do not get heard'. This paper has amplified one migrant child's voice, through an exploration of the implications of a monolingual approach in the context of an English state-funded primary school. We have maintained that the use of the L1 in school should be integrated to support well-being and a positive learning experience, though we also hold that further research is needed in this area. In our discussion above we have sketched out implications for policy and practitioner development, at local and broader scales, and such further research would strengthen the case for these. We would like to finish by making two general

points relating to these. First, there is a need for awareness-raising concerning emergent bilingualism and what it entails. We support an orientation towards the L1 as a valuable resource for pupils: EAL students should be given an unconditional right to use it. Second, we note that pedagogical strategies to which Katerina was subject were developed in isolation by an individual institution. This is a common picture in EAL (Wardman 2013), and can be countered by the raising of cross-institution awareness, developed and communicated at national scale.

## Note

1. The UK Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, which inspects various educational establishments, including state schools

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## ORCID

Olena Gundarina  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1548-4565>

James Simpson  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2087-7008>

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## Appendix 1. Transcription conventions.

(0.5)	timed pause in seconds
(.)	short untimed pause
(( ))	description, commentary and translated text
[ ]	overlapping turns
( )	indecipherable talk
\$\$	smile voice before and at the end of affected talk
↑	marked rise in intonation immediately before the shift
↓	marked fall in intonation immediately before the shift