

BOOK REVIEW

Multilingual Higher Education. Beyond English Medium Orientations

Christa van der Walt

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Multilingual Higher Education. Beyond English Medium Orientations deals with the complexity of learning and teaching in multilingual higher education (HE) environments. *Multilingual Matters* has included this volume in the series “Bilingual Education and Bilingualism”, the same series that includes the latest books published on Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) (see Fortanet-Gómez 2013) or English-medium instruction in HE (see Doiz et al. 2013). However, rather than furthering the discussion on CLIL or English-medium programmes, what this book does is to challenge the view that CLIL programmes are supportive of multilingual education. As the author herself explains, the implementation of CLIL predominantly at the primary and secondary school levels in Europe is often understood as the introduction of English alongside local languages, and this trend addresses a bilingual, rather than a multilingual, dimension of language education. This is very probably the main contribution of this publication to the field: the advocacy of a new conception of multilingualism beyond “English-only multilingualism” so that to succeed at the internationalised HE level students should be required to develop literacy in academic English plus other languages.

Even though this volume may be of interest to teachers and researchers around the globe (84 different countries are mentioned throughout the book), it is a timely publication of particular relevance for European readers. With the backdrop of the European Union and for more than fifty years, the Council of Europe has been promoting educational policies that strengthen multilingualism, linguistic diversity and language rights. Multilingualism has become an EU policy in its own right, which as a result enhances

its relevance. The Council commits EU member states to (i) promoting linguistic diversity in the belief that Europe is multilingual and that all languages in the European area are equal and necessary to deepen mutual understanding; (ii) maintaining valuable modes of communication and expressions of identity; and (iii) consolidating democratic citizenship and sustaining social cohesion. The Council of Europe has taken the position that the maintenance of linguistic diversity should be pursued and, hence, prioritises multilingualism as a key policy goal; it promotes the development of multilingual education policies to strengthen the European heritage of cultural and linguistic diversity and increases public awareness of the part played by languages in forging a European identity. Examples of this policy are the guiding principles, the recommendations and other initiatives launched by the Council and summed up in the contributing paper to the 50th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention (Council of Europe 2006).

This book is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 “The special place of Higher Education” is a general introduction to the whole book and portrays HE as a specific case in education. Van der Walt acknowledges “language as a resource” and claims the need to reconceptualise HE worldwide in terms of multilingualism and balancing local and global interests. In this chapter, two innovative constructs emerge: on the one hand, “vertical mobility”, or the way school education contributes to widen the participation of minoritised learners and students in HE and its rapid expansion, and on the other, “horizontal mobility” (also “transnational mobility”) or the movements of students between countries for the provision of education to linguistically diverse students.

In Chapter 2 “Linguistic diversity in higher education: Official and unofficial multilingual settings”, van der Walt pays a closer look at HE institutions in the five continents to, among other things, “invoke the concept of *ecology* as a conceptual lever to destabilise monolingual orientations to language planning, policy and practices in HE” (p. 49). Indeed, the most interesting point raised in this chapter is the discussion on worldwide multilingual education, which is not meant to provide a thorough review of countries and their language policies but “a sense of the ubiquity of multilingualism in the HE contexts” (p. 49). In line with this, seven multilingual HE contexts are discussed, particular attention being paid to the historical, socio-cultural, cultural, ideological and socio-psychological factors that determine the development of

bi-/multilingual education: Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern America, Asia, the Russian Federation and Eastern Europe, Western Europe and the Middle East.

Chapter 3 “Managing the consequences of English-plus multilingualism: The development of multiliteracies” focuses on the fields of English for Specific and Academic Purposes (ESP/EAP) and the “academic literacies” movement as responses to the demand for language support to be offered particularly in English. Here, the author explores the influence of language learning and teaching paradigms on the acquisition of academic literacy, discusses the hegemony of English as the main and most popular language of science, and examines the possibilities of situated learning for academic literacy development in the terms described by Lave and Wenger (1991).

The main argument underlying Chapter 4 “Multilingual pedagogy in higher education classrooms: Approaches and techniques” is that “planning of multilingual practices needs to happen at classroom level by thinking beyond institutional language policies” (p. 161). This is a practical chapter in which multilingual pedagogy is conceptualised as a result of the tensions between institutional practices and prevailing classroom practices. Throughout this chapter van der Walt elaborates on four of the strategies proposed by García (2009) for bilingual primary and secondary school contexts and shows examples of how these can be achieved in HE classrooms. Such strategies are: institutional code-switching, co-linguaging, translanguaging, preview-view-review; together with a fifth strategy added by the author herself: simultaneous translation.

The last chapter “From *mono* to *multi*: New thinking about higher education” is a final reflection on multilingual HE and addresses the perspectives of “language as a tool for learning” and “language as an identity marker” as contributors to enhancing multilingual literacies in HE contexts. These imply a complex two-way relationship in which “language is a *tool* that enables/prevents the development of an academic (even professional) *identity*” and “language is an *identity* marker that enables/prevents the successful use of language as a *tool* to become a member of a particular academic community in the process of qualifying for a particular profession” (p. 165). This chapter contains an interesting section of future directions for research in multilingual HE, namely: the effects of multilingual strategies on learning, multilingual texts as images, and mobile learning and electronic learning support.

As an original contribution to the field, this volume makes excellent use of practical cases (“A case in point”, included in all chapters) to further the author’s discussion and illustrate the complexities of learning and teaching in multilingual environments. It also provides a very useful summary of the most important challenges faced by multilingual HE contexts around the world. I strongly recommend it to teachers in multilingual HE settings and researchers in bi-/multilingual education.

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