Title of Project:
Plurilingual or Monolingual? A Mixed Methods Study Investigating
Plurilingual Instruction in an EAP Program at a Canadian University

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Final Report

Motivation for the Research

The field of English language education has historically focused on classroom instruction using English only with the assumption that knowledge of languages other than English is irrelevant or unnecessary for effective English language teaching and learning. Many English language learners already speak one, two, or more languages and have rich linguistic and cultural experiences. Teaching English through a monolingual perspective seems incongruent with multilingual settings, such as Canada, where people use language in a flexible manner to, for example, read the news, watch movies, communicate with others, and send text messages. All of these tasks may require different languages and/or a mix of languages depending on the context, situation, and interlocutor. The monolingual perspective in English language teaching has been recently challenged and language education scholarship has recognized the need for pedagogical change with an urgent call for a plurilingual turn in English language teaching (Conteh & Meier 2014; Candelier et al., 2010; Ellis, 2016; Galante, 2018; Kubota, 2016; May, 2014). English language teaching through a plurilingual (and not a monolingual) lens requires that teachers create a pedagogical approach to activate students' entire linguistic and cultural repertoires, and, in doing so, they build awareness and show that communication in culturally diverse settings requires flexibility in cultural norms, understandings, and behaviors.

While the theory of plurilingualism has been available for decades, the plurilingual shift in practice is still a challenge. My doctoral dissertation addresses this challenge by investigating plurilingual instruction in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program. It also addresses one of TIRF's priority areas: plurilingualism in educational contexts, particularly in language

classrooms.

Research Questions

The research questions that were posed were the following:

1. How is the theoretical framework of plurilingualism implemented in an EAP program?
2. What are EAP students' perceptions of plurilingual instruction?
3. What are EAP instructors' perceptions of plurilingual instruction?
4. Does plurilingual instruction have an effect on EAP students' perceived plurilingual and pluricultural competence levels in the treatment group compared to the comparison group over time?

Research Methodology

The study took place in an EAP program in the multilingual and multicultural city of Toronto, Canada. The overarching goal of the study was to investigate affordances and challenges of plurilingual instruction relative to monolingual instruction from both students' and instructors' viewpoints. It also examined the effects of plurilingual instruction on EAP students' perceived plurilingual and pluricultural competence over time and between groups. Seven teachers and 129 students participated in the study for a period of 4 months. Each teacher had two groups of students and they delivered two different types of tasks: 10 plurilingual tasks were used in the treatment group (plurilingual group) and 10 monolingual tasks were used in the comparison group (monolingual group). There were 79 students in the treatment group and 50 in the comparison group. This was a concurrent embedded mixed methods research with a quasi-experimental design and five instruments were used during the data collection process: (1) students diaries, (2) student focus groups, (3) classroom observations, (4) teachers interviews (5) and students' answers to the Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence (PPC) scale, the latter being an innovative instrument that I designed and validated specifically for the study. The PPC scale had 24 items and asked students to provide answers on a 4-point Likert scale: *strongly agree = 4, agree =3, disagree = 2 or strongly disagree = 1*. Examples of items were the following: *When talking to someone who knows the same languages as I do, I feel comfortable switching between one language to another language* and *I understand there are differences between cultures and that what can be considered 'strange' to one person may be considered 'normal' to another*. The PPC scale was applied to students in both treatment and comparison groups at the start (T1) and toward the end (T2) of the program. Students in the treatment group were given a diary at the start of the program and asked to enter their perceptions of the tasks on a weekly basis. A total of 672 student diary entries were collected. Three classroom observations in each treatment group were conducted ($N = 21$) at the start, mid-point, and toward the end of the program. After the program ended, semi-structured interviews with all seven teachers and two focus groups with students—10 students each—were conducted. Data were analyzed using both inductive and deductive approaches and included processes for the analysis of qualitative data that were consistent with Grounded Theory, as well as repeated measures ANOVA and independent samples *t*-tests for quantitative data.

Summary of Findings

The theoretical framework of plurilingualism was implemented in the EAP program through the use of different pedagogical strategies: cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparisons, translanguaging for meaning making (Li, 2018), intercomprehension (Pinho & Andrade, 2009), intercultural communication, awareness of multilingual and multicultural landscapes and of plurilingual and pluricultural identity. The tasks used (all available at www.breakingtheinvisiblewall.com) were student-centered and typically began with awareness-raising questions about the topic, leading to the students' exploration of plurilingual and pluricultural practices. Results from classroom observations (N = 21) show that students easily engaged in reflection relative to languages and dialects they knew as a result of their place of birth and heritage and the languages and cultures learned when traveling, watching movies, playing online games, and using the Internet. In addition, instructors encouraged students to make use of their linguistic and cultural repertoire during the tasks, say words and sentences in other languages, explain behavior and customs from cultures with which they were familiar, deconstruct stereotypes and engage in critical reflections about the use of language and culture in communication. Another interesting result was the gradual change in translanguaging practices that occurred over time. Among most of the instructors, it was the first time that languages other than English were used pedagogically, that is, the instructors deliberately asked the students to use their languages for meaning making. For example, while students were learning new vocabulary items in English, the instructors asked students to offer an equivalent word in other languages to explore concepts and meaning in different languages.

Results from students' weekly learner diary entries show overwhelmingly positive results for plurilingual instruction at both affective and cognitive levels: plurilingual and pluricultural awareness, cognitive development, critical thinking, empathy, and English language learning, among other factors. Students often compared their knowledge of cultures and languages to English, the target language, and the cultural traditions attached it. While no challenges of plurilingual instruction were reported, two challenges related to plurilingual practices stemmed from the student diary data: translation challenges and the need to adopt a monolingual posture depending on the context and interlocutor, which are common issues among people who speak two or more languages.

All of the seven EAP instructors unanimously reported that plurilingual instruction was more beneficial for students compared to plurilingual instruction, as it added a new dimension to the language learning experience. The teachers reported that while they may have allowed students to use their first languages in class before the implementation of plurilingual instruction, this use was unsystematic and unprincipled. In the study, for example, instructors encouraged students to use dictionaries in other languages, to speak in other languages during class activities, to teach one another about languages and cultures they knew, to critically discuss linguistic and cultural norms across languages, and to compare phonological, semantic, grammatical items, and written conventions across languages. If students' plurilingual practices are neither valued nor encouraged, students are left with a guilty feeling when using their entire plurilingual repertoire in classroom practices, which can be detrimental to their identity and language learning experience. Plurilingual instruction is inclusive, values all types of linguistic and cultural

knowledge, and engages English language learners in exercising their plurilingual and pluricultural agency.

Furthermore, results indicate that PPC levels from students who received plurilingual instruction increased significantly over time compared to students who received monolingual instruction. These results indicate that plurilingual instruction increases plurilingual and pluricultural competence, a competence necessary for communication in diverse settings. This result is particularly important as it shows that plurilingual instruction has affordances that monolingual instruction does not: it increases students' ability to develop an awareness of and a know-how to communicate in settings with linguistic fluidity and diverse cultural traditions.

Implications

English language programs may still have "English-only policies," requiring that teachers and students use English only in the classroom. Clearly, this monolingual policy is problematic as it poses barriers to the implementation of plurilingual pedagogy. In addition, language policies in several countries still maintain the need to develop the official language(s) only, placing little value on the development of plurilingual and pluricultural citizens and landscapes with linguistic and cultural diversity. The results of this study provide evidence for the need to maintain a plurilingual environment in schools and language programs, thereby supporting both instructors and students in their plurilingual agency. Pedagogically, a practical achievement of this study is the potential of shifting English language teaching from a monolingual to a plurilingual paradigm; once instructors are supported by policies that include plurilingualism, even if these are internal school decisions, they can help teachers shift to a plurilingual mindset without feeling guilty or being accused of wrongdoing if languages other than English are used in the classroom. Another important achievement of this study is that it links the theory of plurilingualism into practice and provides one way of implementing plurilingualism in a language program. The results of the study are particularly relevant and timely for communication in contexts with increasing multilingualism, such as Canada and other linguistically and culturally diverse countries, and can shift the way languages are learned, taught, and used in communication.

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9

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