

Title

Translanguaging: The overlooked potential in German language classes for adult migrants

Abstract

When migrant adults and adolescents with little or no formal education do not have age-expected literacy, the tendency is to view them through a deficit lens, i.e., what they do not know and cannot do. Such deficit perspectives derive from (often unconscious) Western neocolonial views of what constitutes learning and knowledge (McCaffery, 2016), which consequently negates the experiences, practices, and knowledges of linguistically and culturally diverse learners (Marky, 2019). Western-style formal education, predominant in Western Europe and Anglo-European countries, is predicated on logic, analysis, and literacy. Because culturally situated learning underpin cognitive development in the acquisition of specific types of habits of mind (Flynn, 2007), the cognitive pathways developed through Western-style formal education are neither universal nor ubiquitous (Cole, 2005; Gauvain & Perez, 2015). Thus, these migrants experience considerable challenges when confronted with Western-style formal education. Nevertheless, while these migrants are not accustomed to literacy-based ways of learning, they possess strong oral skills, often in more than one language (Watson, 2019). Yet, since these are primarily non-dominant European languages, teachers rarely see them as a resource. By choosing to leverage oral skills, regardless of languages, teachers can move away from a deficit approach to asset-based learning to build these learners' literacy skills and foster successful second language learning (García & Kleyn, 2016).

Here we present the analysis of our study of instructors of German in courses with migrants, many of whom had no or little formal education. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in Summer 2021 and subsequently analyzed using qualitative content analysis according to Kuckartz (2018). We examine how while some teachers make use of learners' multilingual skills, this is the exception, leaving the multilingual oral assets of learners mostly overlooked and underutilized. We explore teachers' explicit and implicit assumptions, including beliefs about second language acquisition and questions of power and identity, as well as systemic top-down constraints of curriculum, learning materials, and assessment requirements.

References

- Cole, M. (2005). Cross-cultural and historical perspectives on the developmental consequences of education. *Human Development*, 48(4), 195-216. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000086855>
- Flynn, J. (2007). *What is intelligence?* New York: Cambridge University Press.
- García, O. (2017). Problematizing linguistic integration of migrants: The role of translanguaging and language teachers. In Jean-Claude Beacco, Hans-Jürgen Krumm, David Little, & Philia Thalgott (eds.), *The linguistic integration of adult migrants / L'intégration linguistique des migrants adultes* (pp. 11-26). Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter. <https://rm.coe.int/the-linguistic-integration-of-adult-migrants-lessons-from-research-l-i/168070a67f>.
- Gauvain, M., & Perez, S. (2015). The socialization of cognition. In J. E. Grusec & P. D. Hastings (Eds.), *Handbook of socialization: Theory and research* (pp. 566-589). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

- Marky, J.P. (2019). Language, education, and development: postcolonial societies and neoliberalism. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 40(4), 507-522
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2019.1591269>
- McCaffrey, J. (2016). Western education: Suitable for everyone? Education for travelling, marginalized, and indigenous communities in the West. *Prospects*, 46, 491–505
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-017-9413-x>
- Watson, J. (2019). Understanding indigenous education practices as a way of engaging deeply with refugee-background students (and everyone else) in the classroom. *European Journal of Applied Linguistics [Special Issue]*. Retrieved from:
https://www.academia.edu/38397227/Understanding_Indigenous_education_practices_as_a_way_of_engaging_deeply_with_refugee-background_students_and_everyone_else_in_the_classroom

Bios

Dr. Andrea DeCapua has held academic appointments at various institutions, most recently at New York University and the University of North Florida. Dr. DeCapua specializes in professional development for teachers and research focusing on multilingual learners and students with limited or interrupted formal education.

Dr. Ina-Maria Maahs is the Deputy Head of the Department of *Language and Professional Development* at the Mercator Institute, University of Cologne. Her current work focuses on German as a second language, multilingualism, language skills assessment, and language integrated learning in social sciences.

Marco Triulzi, M.A. is the DAAD Lecturer for German as a Foreign Language at the University of Sapienza, Rome. His research interests are multilingualism in language teaching and migrant learners with little or no formal education.