

1.2.2 Multilingualism

Transcript

Slide 1

In this module, we are going to focus on multilingualism, the everyday reality for many of us in this program and beyond.

Slide 2

But before we begin, think about **your experience** as a **user** and a **teacher** of English.

- What does **multilingualism** mean to you? What kind of characteristics would you say that multilingual communication may have?
- How do you think acknowledging your students' multilingualism affects their **academic performance**?

Click the **link** under the video to share your views if you haven't done so yet.

Slide 3

Let's now start with the definition of multilingualism. Often, multilingualism and pluralism are used interchangeably in texts written in the English language. Multilingualism has been defined in many different ways by various experts. But, according to the official definition provided by the **European Commission**, **multilingualism** refers to "the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with **more than one language** in their day-to-day lives"

Slide 4

Meanwhile, more conventional definitions have made the distinction between multilingualism and pluralism, attaching **the former to societies** and **the latter to individuals**. However, as in this definition, the difference is not addressed in most instances. Still, it is important to keep in mind that the term **plurilingualism** usually refers to the state of the sum of languages spoken in societies as a whole.

Slide 5

Multilingualism is then understood both as a **human capacity** and a **societal fact**. In the case of the former, we talk about individuals speaking/using multiple languages since birth or since one point in their childhood or adulthood.

Slide 6

In some societies, there are **multiple home languages**, as in both parents being multilingual and teaching these languages to their children. In fact, as many researchers now reveal, **multilingualism is the norm across the world** populations rather than monolingualism.

Slide 7

But, how exactly can we define and describe the languages in one's multilingual repertoire or as spoken by members of a society? One of the most common distinctions is the one between **dominant** and **non-dominant** or **home languages**. In many societies, there is one **dominant language**—in most cases this is also the **official language**.

Languages other than the dominant language, the **non-dominant languages**, are less powerful either by the number of their speakers, or the value they bring to its speakers for political, economic, or social reasons.

Slide 8

In the case of **immigrant households** for instance, children acquire home languages first, and the societal/dominant language as soon as they start schooling. Yet, they might follow different trajectories in their final multilingual make-up. They might be better speakers in home or dominant languages, depending on the environment they have been raised in.

Slide 9

Now, let's stop here for a moment, and turn to the next activity. In this one, you're required to do some Internet search to answer the following questions:

- How many **non-dominant languages** can you list that are spoken across Europe?
- How many **different home languages** can you list that you know are spoken in your country/city?

As in the previous one, please click the **link** under the video to share your views.

Slide 10

Unlike what many people think, **daily interactions** are mostly multilingual than monolingual across a wide range of the world's communities. As stated before, the world population is predominantly composed of multilingual individuals, and much of what we call daily interaction takes place in multiple languages rather than single languages. Take the example of a **multi-ethnic marketplace** in a city, or a **break time following a lesson**, or an **international business place**—public places like these and many more are marked by multilingual interactions.

Slide 11

In most cases, people in these places need multiple languages to carry their meaning across. For instance, in case they do not know a word in language A, they might insert it from language B, and still be understood provided their interlocutor also speaks both of these languages.

Although some of us might be exposed to monolingual interactions more often than multilingual, we should know that **multilingual interactions are as natural as monolingual for the majority of the world population.**

Slide 12

Researchers have studied these linguistic practices extensively. They have found that for any multilingual individual, one of the most natural forms of talk is mixing the languages, “codes” as they speak. They have named these practices as code-mixing, or –switching, or –alternation. These are slightly different than each other as research topics. However, the idea behind them is the same—individuals switch between languages to ease their communication or achieve a certain effect, such as humor.

Slide 13

An interesting finding of research on code-mixing is that multilingual people do not randomly switch back and forth between languages—they follow certain principles in these switches. Sometimes, they just insert one word from language B into their sentence in language A, and sometimes, they start one sentence in language A, and finish in language B.

Slide 14

At other times, they say the first sentence in language A and the second sentence in language B, so on and so forth. But we all know that they switch codes at very meaningful points in their speech. For instance, they know how to provide a noun in one language and its suffix in another. Or they know to replace a verb with another verb.

The **motivations** for code-switching might vary: it might simply be the lack of knowledge of a word, or it might be the syntactic structure of the languages at hand (because it is easier, more “accessible” to switch than to continue in the same language), or it might simply aim at achieving a stylistic effect.

Slide 15

In some of these instances, individuals are aware that they are code-switching, and in others they do it automatically without much thinking. But one thing is for sure: All of these are **natural linguistic behaviours** that multilinguals employ on a daily basis.

Slide 16

Just as it is impossible to separate language from thought, it is hard to imagine language developing independent of one's identity. Recent years' research has come to show that, rather than a static entity, **identity is constructed through interaction among individuals**. Multilingual identities, likewise, are constructed through multilingual talk. It is good to know, however, that rather than the sum of languages in one's linguistic repertoire, multilingual identities draw on a range of resources that are **linguistic, semiotic, and multi-modal**.

Slide 17

Thus, if one has a native language identity and an English identity, his identity is not the sum of these two--rather, it is a **skillful combination of resources in the two languages in one's repertoire**. People **construct, enact, re-construct, and re-enact their identities all the time**, depending on who they interact with and what kind of situations they find themselves in. Thus, **when teaching English, a teacher is also helping the learner start constructing a multilingual identity**.

Slide 18

Identity construction starts at a **very early age**, as soon as the individual starts socializing with the adults around her/him. As soon as she/he realizes the **importance of social behavior**, the individual starts constructing roles and act accordingly. Language is a key in constructing this identity, because it determines how individuals connect with others in their community. But these connections also shape the language people speak—thus, **language and identity** in are in a mutual relationship with each other.

Slide 19

When individuals speak multiple languages, they do not necessarily construct a separate identity for each one of them. Rather, **different aspects of their identity are constructed through constant interaction with the languages they speak**.

Slide 20

For instance, a person might identify with nationalism, and she/he might construct this identity through her/his resources in multiple languages in her/his repertoire.

Many immigrants (say, Turks in Germany) construct their joy when their homeland football team wins a match against the host country's team, but they do so in the German language or a mix of Turkish-German language.



Slide 21

Now, it's time for our third set of questions to answer.

Can you think of other ways multilingual immigrants construct and enact their identities?

Do you think this construction is stable? Why or why not?

Again, please click the link under the video to share your views.

Slide 22

Multilingualism has a lot to do with **transnational identity**. As **globalization** and **migration** have become widespread social phenomena around the world, individuals have identified more as transnationals than as anything else. We all know people who move to other countries for work, education, or simply to live a better life—as they move, they also learn new languages. These languages help them construct transnational identities.

Slide 23

For instance, by learning the language of the host society, transnationals access more resources and construct new sets of identities to negotiate them. Take **immigrants** who come from underprivileged backgrounds—it is very common among them to start speaking the language of the host society as soon as their children start schooling. They start bonding with other parents, regularly meeting the teachers, and socializing with their children.

Slide 24

These are all new sets of resources that they access through starting to live in a new country. These relationships affect their language learning and use as well as constructing new transnational identities.

Slide 25

Transnational identities, however, are not the only identities available for multilingual individuals. People construct and re-construct their ethnic, racial, and gender identities when they start living in new countries, as well.

Slide 26

For instance, in their homeland, people might belong to an ethnic minority, but when they migrate, this aspect of their identity might be more pronounced. If this ethnicity requires speaking a different language than the national language of their homeland, they continue speaking this language in their new country of



residence, and even become more protective about it and transmit it to the next generation.

Slide 27

The opposite might happen, too. Individuals might be ready to give up on their minority language and raise their children both in the national language of their homeland and the language spoken in their new country of residence—they do so for the purpose of **helping their children better integrate into the society.**

Slide 28

People's **racial identities** also play a role in the **construction of their multilingual identities.** For instance, in some Western societies, like in the UK, race plays an important role in people's access to resources—people's access to resources might be blocked based on their racial background, and this in turn might result in various different forms of constructing and enacting multilingual identities. To exemplify, an African-based immigrant community might turn more inwards as they are not allowed educational or economic resources, which would bring them closer to native speakers.

Slide 29

Multilingualism never ceases to be an important topic in education. Particularly in the case of Europe, migration is not the only reason for multilingualism to be a societal fact. Multilingual students might come from **immigrant minority** or **regional minority** background. Composed of many different nations with a diversity of histories, **Europe has been a multilingual continent for centuries.**

Slide 30

This history has led into the persistence of regional minority languages across countries. **Regional minority speakers** have different multilingual compositions as they have become natural elements of the countries that they live in. Yet, as a new reality of the last few decades, there are also immigrant minorities across European countries, who come from a wide range of homelands speaking a wide range of languages.

Slide 31

These students have a more diverse composition than the regional minorities in terms of economic background, home languages, religion, and the like. **This diversity makes the classrooms in Europe much more diverse today than in the past.**

Slide 32

In the context of migration, heritage languages are those spoken at home by one's family. Thus, Arabic, Turkish, or Chinese would be considered as heritage

languages spoken, for instance, in London. Many different immigrant communities today try to retain their heritage languages through teaching them in schools sponsored by their own communities.

Slide 33

Known as **Saturday schools or community schools**, these schools contribute to the learning and use of heritage languages through regular instruction. Heritage language schools show differences in characteristics across the countries in Europe, and they are also different than the schools of their kind in the US.

Slide 34

It is important to acknowledge that multilingual classrooms of today's schools require different pedagogies than in the past—it holds true both for foreign language and subject classes. There are **two sides to approaching multilingual pedagogies**:

1. What to do with classrooms in which students come from twenty-something different linguistic backgrounds?
2. What to do with schools in which most of the students are multilinguals?

Slide 35

Classroom pedagogies should address both of these dimensions: while they should attend to the multilingual composition of the classroom, they should also attend to each multilingual student's needs. That is to say, be it language or subject classes, each class should be encompassing enough to include multilingual students of various backgrounds while at the same time acknowledging the uniqueness of their multilingual repertoire.

Slide 36

Let's now focus on the notion of multilingualism with English. The spread of English around the world also means the spread of English as learned and used by multilingual people—this fact has led into the notion of multilingualism with English to develop. Most multilinguals around the world are also English speakers, as English has become a regular school subject in many countries across the world

Yet, depending on the context, **multilinguals' exposure to English shows variations**.

Slide 37

What is important for us to acknowledge is the role of English in the multilinguals' linguistic repertoires. **Particularly in the case of immigrant situations, students with immigrant background might perform better in**

English than in their heritage languages or the host society's languages.
This might stem from the positive attitudes they develop for English.

Slide 38

English as a lingua franca is the language of the digital, multilingual contexts, as well, as these are spaces without borders and practically anyone can have an “online presence”. With the access to multimodal resources offered by the digital world, English today is spoken in ways and contexts that have never existed before.

Slide 39

For instance, **online forums** where people from around the world type and post their messages including the symbols and other multi-modal, semiotic tools—altogether, these verbal and non-verbal elements in online communication enhance meaning. They also align with the **digital habits of our day**, where we spend a considerable portion of our day online and stay connected to the rest of the world.

Slide 40

In the multilingual classrooms, English lessons themselves, and other lessons, by providing spaces for English, enhance students’ understanding of **English as an important element of their multilingual repertoires**. This tells us that **English can be exploited for the appreciation of multilingual repertoires and identities in the classroom**. In this way, it is **not seen as a language only but a way of connecting with the rest of the world** and accessing resources in the other languages in a multilingual’s repertoire.

Slide 41

As we are about to close this module, let’s go on with our last activity:

Find some **real-life examples from your own classes** that are **evidence of students’ awareness of their own multilingualism**.

Discuss **how they these examples can be understood with reference to the way that you teach**.

Again, please click the **link** under the video to share your views at the Forum of this section.

Thanks for your attention!