

EDITORIAL: POLICIES AND PRACTICES FOR GLOBAL MULTILINGUALISM

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In today's globalized world, multilingualism is no longer simply a reflection of linguistic diversity but a critical mechanism shaping the social, economic, and political landscapes. With unprecedented levels of global mobility, migration, and transnational interaction, multilingualism has become both a norm and a necessity for individuals and institutions alike. Language is the medium through which identities are formed, power is negotiated, and cultural heritages are preserved, making multilingualism an essential component of modern life. As such, language practices go beyond mere communication and serve as tools of empowerment, inclusion, and, in some cases, exclusion.

Multilingualism management has emerged as a central theme in contemporary language policies, whether to suppress it, from a language-as-a-problem perspective, or to encourage it, from the language-as-a-right or language-as-a-resource perspective (Ruiz, 1984). We increasingly understand the active relationship between both concepts —multilingualism and language policies—for the promotion of languages and linguistic *repertoires*, and that multilingualism is, in this sense, an asset for the construction of plural nations, post-national, and, ultimately, for the shaping of a multipolar world.

Historically, language studies have been dominated by perspectives from the Global North, particularly those from Europe and North America. These viewpoints have often prioritized monolingual ideologies, standardization, and linguistic purity. Under this framework, the multilingual realities of people in multicultural urban settings are viewed through the lens of linguistic separation, where languages are treated as distinct entities with clear boundaries (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). The assumption has been that language operates within structured systems that can be neatly defined and controlled.



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However, over the last few decades, theoretical advancements in sociolinguistics have shifted this view. Scholars like McKinney et al. (2024) argue that multilingualism extends beyond the mere coexistence or interlocution of languages. Instead, it transcends geographical boundaries, probing into the deeper social and political contexts that shape language use. This understanding is especially critical for countries in the Global South, where language has long been intertwined with issues of identity, power, and inequality.

In this new paradigm, *superdiversity*—introduced by Vertovec (2007) and further developed by Blommaert & Rampton (2011)—challenges the notion of languages as discrete systems. Instead, superdiversity emphasizes that in societies where individuals from varied ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds intersect, language use is fluid, adaptive, and highly context-dependent. Rather than being confined by fixed linguistic categories, speakers in superdiverse contexts draw on diverse semiotic resources to navigate complex social environments. This framework is particularly significant in urban spaces and sectors like healthcare and education, where cross-cultural communication is vital (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011).

The concept of *plurilingualism* is yet another concept that has made an impact on societies. It focuses on the idea that individuals have a *repertoire* of linguistic skills that they can use flexibly across different contexts. According to Moore & Gajo (2009), plurilingualism goes beyond the idea of multilingualism as a mastery of multiple languages, emphasizing instead the adaptive nature of language use. This approach is particularly relevant in globalized societies, where individuals may need to switch between languages in different social, professional, and digital settings. Plurilingualism has implications for education and language policy, as it challenges the traditional monolingual ideologies that underpin many educational systems. In plurilingual education, students are encouraged to draw on their home languages as well as additional languages to create a more inclusive learning environment.

Global migration and mobility have further complicated the landscape. Linguistic diversity is increasingly recognized as a critical issue. On the one hand, global languages such as English have gained dominance, particularly in sectors like education, business, and diplomacy, creating opportunities for upward mobility and economic integration. On the other hand, this dominance has raised concerns about the marginalization of less powerful languages, which may be relegated to the periphery of public life. Neoliberal policies, with their emphasis on growth, flexibility, and individualization, have redefined language learning and teaching, often prioritizing market-driven language competencies (Duchêne & Heller, 2012). Yet, this focus on language as a tool for economic advancement can overshadow the rich cultural, historical, and identity-based dimensions of

multilingualism, leading to the marginalization of less economically powerful languages.

Thus, multilingualism, in this sense, is not merely a linguistic phenomenon; it is also a site of struggle for cultural survival and political agency. In contexts where language rights are tied to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and legal protection, the way languages are valued and used has profound implications for social equity. Within this context, the role of multilingualism as a social and political tool becomes evident. Language policies in the Global South are often shaped by historical legacies of colonialism, wherein dominant colonial languages continue to hold power in official and educational domains, while Indigenous and local languages struggle for recognition. This creates a tension between promoting linguistic equity and the need to adapt to globalized linguistic markets. As a result, multilingual realities in regions like Latin America, India, and South Africa reveal complex negotiations of power, identity, and access.

A key concern within this shift is the recognition that the voices and linguistic realities of the Global South—spanning regions such as Africa, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and South America— have historically been neglected in mainstream applied linguistics or language policy studies. At the heart of these discussions are colonial legacies that have shaped language policies across the Global South. Postcolonial scholars such as Mignolo (2011) call for the decolonization of language policies to promote linguistic justice, recognizing the intrinsic value of Indigenous languages. Phillipson (1992) critiques the dominance of former colonial languages (such as English, French, and Spanish) in governmental, educational, and economic spheres, which perpetuates linguistic imperialism. As a result, multilingualism in regions like Latin America, South Africa, and India continues to grapple with issues of cultural survival and political agency.

In addition to the social and political dimensions of multilingualism, it is essential to consider the aesthetic and creative potentials that arise from linguistic diversity. A striking example is the emergence of multilingual literature—novels and poetry that artfully blend languages to create new forms of literary expression. This trend has gained significant recognition, particularly following the innovative use of codeswitching in contemporary fiction, which has been especially well-received by Latin American diasporic readers in the United States. This dynamic interplay of languages adds layers of meaning and cultural resonance, deepening the reader's experience.

Moreover, similar patterns of creative multilingualism can be observed in other parts of the world, such as India, Colombia and Brazil, where

diverse linguistic landscapes have fostered unique literary traditions that reflect the complexities of these multilingual societies. As Bourdieu (1977) observed, “a language is worth what those who speak it are worth” (p. 651), a sentiment that continues to resonate in contemporary discussions on the coloniality of language. The unequal valuing of languages, driven not only by social class dynamics but also by entrenched racial hierarchies, stresses the need to critically engage with multilingualism from a Global South standpoint.

This volume brings together a diverse selection of papers that critically examine the evolving landscape of multilingualism, with a strong focus on the Global South. The contributions cover a wide range of vital topics including language education, language policies, linguistic rights, intercultural mediation, translation and accessibility, and literary studies. The growing role of technology in fostering linguistic diversity is another key focus, with several contributions offering insights into how digital tools are reshaping communication across languages.

What makes this volume particularly significant is its emphasis on the multilingual dynamics of the Global South—contexts that are often overlooked in global conversations about language. By bringing these perspectives to the forefront, this special issue sheds new light on the complexities of multilingualism today. The contributions offer critical insights and innovative approaches to challenges, such as reforming education systems, promoting linguistic equity, and using technology to bridge language divides, making this collection a timely and important contribution to ongoing discussions about the future of multilingualism.

In the context of higher education, multilingualism plays a critical role, especially in regions where linguistic diversity reflects historical and social inequalities. In South Africa, for instance, despite the country’s multilingual policy theoretically supporting the inclusion of African languages in academic settings, these languages remain underrepresented, affecting the academic performance of Indigenous language speakers. The case study by Gambushe illustrates how the limited integration of African languages contributes to student underperformance, particularly as English and Afrikaans continue to dominate the academic environment. The study argues that plurilingual approaches—which encourage students to use all of their linguistic resources—could offer a more inclusive model for higher education.

This case study resonates with the themes in other regions where language policies remain a critical issue. For instance, in Colombia, Indigenous women learning English as part of their academic journey face a unique set of challenges. While English is often seen as a key to academic and economic success, it also poses a threat to the cultural identities of Indigenous

communities. The case study by Velásquez and Giraldo explores how these women navigate the tension between embracing global opportunities through English while striving to preserve their linguistic heritage.

The dominance of English as a global language continues to shape Colombia's educational system, raising concerns about the marginalization of Indigenous languages. The Colombian case study examines how multilingual education policies can be restructured to support both global language competencies and the preservation of Indigenous linguistic heritage. The findings advocate for a plurilingual approach that empowers students to develop a flexible linguistic *repertoire*, incorporating both global and local languages.

Further examining Colombia's higher education system, Miranda et al. critique the prioritization of English for international competitiveness, which contributes to language stratification and the commodification of English. Grounded in critical race theory and decoloniality, the study critiques the English-Spanish bilingual model and recommends a more inclusive multilingual approach. Their findings suggest that English-centered ideologies dominate, often marginalizing other languages and sociocultural realities. The study offers valuable insights into reshaping higher education language frameworks to better accommodate linguistic diversity through a more holistic and inclusive approach.

These examples illustrate the complexities of multilingual education in post-colonial contexts. The dominance of global languages in higher education can serve as both a gateway to opportunity and a mechanism of exclusion, particularly for students from marginalized linguistic backgrounds. This volume argues for the need to rethink language policies in higher education to promote greater inclusion of local languages, not only as subjects of study but also as mediums of instruction.

In healthcare settings, effective communication is often a matter of life and death. Multilingualism in healthcare, therefore, becomes a critical issue, particularly in countries with diverse populations. The Romanian case study by Ioniță and Vlad included in this volume explores how international medical students and local patients navigate linguistic barriers in clinical settings. The study shows that while English may serve as a lingua franca in medical education, local languages remain essential for effective patient care. The findings highlight the need for healthcare systems to develop multilingual communication strategies that ensure patients are able to understand medical information and express their needs. This includes training medical professionals in linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as developing translation and interpretation services to bridge communication gaps. The study provides a valuable contribution to ongoing discussions about how healthcare institutions can become more linguistically inclusive, particularly in regions where migration and cultural diversity are on the rise.

The economic implications of multilingualism are most clearly seen in the field of digital commerce, where language localization can make or break business relationships. The Andalusian case study by Ramírez-Delgado in this volume explores the challenges of digital commerce in multilingual environments, focusing specifically on the agri-food sector and how language localization impacts cross-border trade. The findings indicate that while companies invest in website localization for their English-speaking audiences, other languages—such as French, which is critical for Andalusia’s trade with Francophone countries—often suffer from inadequate translations. The study shows that poor localization can lead to miscommunication and a loss of business opportunities, emphasizing the need for more robust multilingual strategies in international trade.

The economic implications of multilingualism extend beyond commerce, as language policies also play a key role in shaping labour markets, immigration policies, and access to economic resources. Countries with strong multilingual policies often see greater economic inclusion, particularly for migrant populations who bring diverse linguistic skills to the labour force. However, these benefits are not always evenly distributed, and the commodification of global languages can reinforce linguistic hierarchies that privilege speakers of dominant languages over those who speak Indigenous or minority languages.

In a comparative study of language policies towards Spanish in Trinidad & Tobago and the Philippines by Antony Hoyte-West, the focus shifts to postcolonial contexts where Spanish has re-emerged as a significant language despite its colonial past. Both nations share a history of colonial rule by Spain, followed by dominance from English-speaking powers (the UK in Trinidad & Tobago and the US in the Philippines). In recent years, both countries have seen a renewed interest in Spanish, driven by educational, political, and sociocultural factors. By applying a cyclical language policy framework, the study explores the stages of policy development, from emergence to evaluation, and highlights how geopolitical influences shape contemporary language policies. The analysis sheds light on how postcolonial nations navigate the reintroduction of a former colonial language within the broader context of globalization and national identity formation.

Hoyte-West’s research further highlights how this resurgence is not isolated but part of a broader postcolonial trend. His work draws attention to the political, educational, and cultural forces that shape the return of Spanish in these regions. By expanding this framework to other Caribbean and Southeast Asian nations, the study suggests that important lessons can be drawn for postcolonial settings, where historical language ties must be balanced with modern multilingual needs. This makes the study particularly

relevant in understanding the complex negotiations that surround language policies in these contexts.

In multilingual societies, language plays a crucial role in intercultural mediation—the process of facilitating communication between people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This is especially important in sectors such as healthcare, education, and the legal system, where effective communication can determine the success or failure of social integration efforts. The Romanian healthcare case study included in this volume provides a compelling example of how multilingualism can be leveraged to improve patient care and reduce cultural misunderstandings. In medical settings, the ability to communicate effectively across language barriers is essential for ensuring that patients receive the care they need. The study highlights the need for healthcare professionals to be trained in both linguistic and cultural sensitivity, as well as the importance of translation and interpretation services in facilitating communication between patients and healthcare providers.

Intercultural mediation also plays a key role in education, where multilingual classrooms often bring together students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In such environments, teachers must act as mediators, helping students navigate the cultural differences that shape their learning experiences. Sara Lucía Monroy argues that multilingual education can serve as a powerful tool for social cohesion, by promoting cultural understanding and mutual respect between students from different linguistic backgrounds.

The contribution on the Forro language in São Tomé and Príncipe by Garcia-Azkoaga and Montroy offers critical insights into the role of minority languages in intergenerational communication and social inclusion. In a context where Forro coexists with the hegemonic Portuguese and has a limited institutional presence, the study explores how creative methods such as dubbing workshops can help bridge the generational gap and ensure the transmission of Forro to younger generations. Through collaboration between elderly speakers and children, the study demonstrates how audiovisual tools can revitalize minority languages, promote cultural cohesion, and provide visibility to marginalized language communities. By emphasizing the social and cultural benefits of such projects, this work highlights the potential of digital interventions to support linguistic diversity and counteract the social exclusion experienced by speakers of endangered languages.

Rodríguez-Fuentes & Denny in their report on Study Abroad Programming in Writing Centers between Universidad del Norte, in Colombia, and Purdue University, in the USA, explores how a translanguaging approach was applied to tutor education, focusing on the fluid use of English and Spanish. The case study highlights the value of incorporating decolonial theory into multilingual education, particularly in the context of writing centers. It critiques the program's focus on pragmatic institutional goals, noting that while

practical translanguaging approaches were emphasized, more explicit guidance from decolonial perspectives could have enriched the project. The study also examines the challenges of implementing translanguaging in study abroad contexts, shaped by institutional constraints and local factors. Ultimately, this exchange program highlights the potential for study-abroad programs to foster innovative multilingual pedagogies and contribute to decolonial educational practices.

The bilingual policies in Colombia over the last two decades have focused on promoting Spanish and English as dominant languages in education (Pelález & Usma, 2017). However, concerns have arisen regarding the stratification of languages, the commodification of English for privileged groups, and the use of foreign benchmarks. There is also a recognized gap in the conditions needed for effective policy implementation, as well as limitations in the English-Spanish bilingualism model, which overlooks the country's ecological and multilingual diversity. Miranda et al.'s study explores these issues in higher education, focusing on how language policies address access, permanence, and language promotion for students and faculty. It concludes with recommendations for adopting a more inclusive multilingual approach in higher education institutions.

In the digital age, translation and accessibility have emerged as critical components of linguistic diversity. In Uruguay, Álvarez & Gorrostorrazo, the study of audio description (AD) in film highlights the growing importance of multilingual accessibility in media. The field of AD is still in its early stages in the country, but there are efforts to analyze the linguistic and textual features of AD scripts in cinema. By using a multimodal corpus, this research provides a foundation for both academic inquiry and professional training in the field of accessibility. The study reveals that AD practices have the potential to expand linguistic inclusivity, particularly by adapting for multilingual contexts and providing access to cinema for a wider audience, including those with visual impairments.

The role of translation in promoting linguistic diversity is also explored by van Egdom, who examines the intersection of literary translation and language technology, focusing on how machine translation (MT) can be leveraged to promote linguistic and cultural diversity in literature. In the context of *Weltliteratur* (world literature), the article explores the role of MT as a tool to support the global flow of literature and foster inclusivity. However, the author cautions against the oversimplified adoption of MT, warning that while it can enhance accessibility to diverse literatures, it must be used carefully to avoid undermining the nuances of cultural and literary translation. The article draws on insights from translation studies, computational linguistics, and cultural studies, proposing strategies to harness MT effectively for a more diverse and inclusive literary landscape.

Jatobá's review offers another perspective on translation, focusing on language education and translator training initiatives in China. The article examines how China's foreign language policies support the teaching of less commonly used foreign languages, such as Portuguese, within the framework of broader geopolitical strategies like the Belt and Road Initiative.

Villada Castro explores the epistemological challenges associated with plurilingual education in French language teaching. The study proposes conceptual tools to diversify French instruction by integrating learners' heterogeneous linguistic and cultural repertoires. It examines plurilingual approaches and plurilingual appropriation competence through a reflection on interdisciplinary francophone research conducted over the last two decades. The author argues for a rethinking of the traditional exclusion of translation in language didactics and suggests a resignified approach to translation. By reinstating translation's heuristic and methodological functions, the article advocates for more emancipatory practices in both the teaching of French and translation, aiming to foster pluralism in language instruction.

Finally, the exploration of linguistic rights in Brazil offers an essential perspective on the legal framework surrounding minority languages. The study by Matos & Carvalho traces the evolution of linguistic rights in Brazilian legal discourse, highlighting the struggles of Indigenous and other marginalized communities in securing these rights. This legal analysis illustrates the broader struggle for language co-officialization and the recognition of linguistic diversity within national legal systems.

Together, these studies reveal a complex picture of how language policies are enacted and practiced across different regions and sectors. Whether in the context of higher education, media accessibility, or language-in-education policies, the studies show how multilingualism intersects with issues of power, access, and social equity. The common thread running through these contributions is the need for language policies that not only address global demands (such as the dominance of English) but also promote the preservation and promotion of local and Indigenous languages. As these studies show, language policies are not merely technical matters; they are deeply tied to questions of identity, inclusion, and cultural heritage.

Through these diverse case studies, empirical research, and theoretical explorations, this volume presents multilingualism as both a resource and a challenge deeply embedded in societal structures. By drawing on examples from South Africa, Colombia, Romania, Brazil, and beyond, the research presented here emphasizes the urgent need for inclusive language policies that reflect the realities of culturally and linguistically diverse societies. Linguistic justice, equity, and empowerment remain at the core of this issue, and the contributions in this volume collectively advocate for a reimagining of how multilingualism is understood and implemented globally.

Looking ahead, the future of multilingualism will depend on the ability of policymakers, educators, and community leaders to create inclusive environments that value all languages equally. This volume offers not only a snapshot of the current state of global multilingualism but also a blueprint for future policy development, with the hope that these insights will contribute to ongoing discussions about how to create more equitable and inclusive language policies worldwide.

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