

## Multilingualism and Plurilingualism in Teaching the Lingua Franca: A Critical Review

Marzieh Ebrahimi<sup>1\*</sup>

Kansas State University, USA

### Review Article

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### Abstract

This study investigates the groundbreaking and significant integration of plurilingualism and multilingualism within the context of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The incorporation of this approach presents a potential for redefining educational paradigms to promote inclusivity and equality. However, it also presents other issues that necessitate careful examination, including theoretical uncertainties, practical challenges, and constraints associated with critical pedagogy. The subject matter beyond the boundaries of academic discussion, exerting influence on the educational experiences of individuals globally, and necessitates an approach that is attuned to the specific situation. It is imperative to recognize the inherent complexities of languages, as they serve not only as means of communication, but also as cultural, authoritative, and individual manifestations. To address this intricate task in an effective manner, it is imperative for future scholars to embrace a dual approach characterized by boldness and humility, while acknowledging the extensive global ramifications involved. The achievement that could be attained in this domain requires a denial of overly simplistic resolutions and demands an active, intricate comprehension of the intricate aspects of language and education.

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<sup>1</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3011-4119> | ✉ [marzieheb@ksu.edu](mailto:marzieheb@ksu.edu)

\* PhD Candidate, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Kansas State University, USA

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## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of multilingualism has emerged as a tangible occurrence in various regions across the globe due to the influences of globalization and the changing demographics that have led to the formation of multilingual societies (Natsyuk & Osidak, 2023). Rooted in pluralism theory, multilingualism and plurilingualism are important and relatively new phenomena that are opposite to monolingual and monocultural orientations (Galante & Cruz, 2021) and are frequent research concerns in many areas of humanities such as media studies (e.g., Khoshsaligheh et al. 2022; Eriss & Khoshsaligheh, 2023) besides language education. Knowledge of many languages or the acceptance of linguistic diversity within a single community is what the Council of Europe (2001, p. 4) calls “multilingualism”. To emphasize the idea of plurilingual competence, the Council of Europe has favored the word plurilingualism since the early 2000s (Castellotti & Moore, 2002). According to the Council of Europe (2001), plurilingualism emphasizes that as an individual’s exposure to language broadens within their cultural environment, including the language spoken at home and that of the wider society, the individual does not compartmentalize these languages and cultures in a strictly segregated manner. Instead, they develop a communicative competence that integrates and interconnects all their language-related knowledge and experiences.

This concept highlights the need to embrace varying degrees of mastery of the language learned and the interconnectedness of the individual's developed linguistic abilities. Some scholars have argued that plurilingualism is a defining feature of research conducted in French-speaking countries. However, the term “plurilingualism” is not even included in English dictionaries and is searched for on the Internet ten times less often than “multilingualism” (Tremblay, 2010).

This research is aided by the distinction between multilingualism and plurilingualism. The former results in the implementation of syllabi offering the opportunity to learn different languages separately, while the latter recognizes the interconnectedness of the sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic dimensions of language acquisition and use. Plurilingual learning settings that allow students to rely on their varied and developing capabilities across their range of target languages would be easier to conceive if sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic considerations were given equal weight.

Indeed, in recent years, the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) has faced some challenges and problems that may partially due to globalization. As a consequence of globalization, a global village has been formed wherein people should learn to adapt to cultural and social transformations (Slaughter & Cross, 2020; Sadeghi, 2012). Within this particular setting, it is imperative to prioritize the exploration of various symbolic systems in order to facilitate the formation and sharing of meaning and information. This approach is crucial for enhancing the communicative abilities of learners within their specific socio-cultural milieu. (Slaughter & Cross, 2020).

The emergence of pluralistic and multicultural societies is an important sign of societal change. In such societies, it is necessary to apply a multicultural/pluralistic lens to education. Indeed, a paradigm shift towards pluralism is observed in educational systems and societies to support the idea of multiple competing value systems and moralities, where no value system is superior to the other (Stika, 2012). As a result, the emergence of pluralistic education has provided a novel framework that aims to foster

alternative cognitive processes and knowledge systems, emphasizing the significance of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Consequently, a new generation of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students has been formed with new needs. To fulfill these new needs, some phenomena have emerged, including the change of attitudes towards cultural tolerance and openness, the establishment of pluralistic views towards education, and multicultural/pluralistic consideration of the social environment in education (Giselbrecht, 2009). According to Giselbrecht (2009), in pluralism theory, it is recognized that identities, customs, languages, traditions, and histories are constructed and reconstructed in connection to and from interaction with one another, and that different articulation is always a risk for transformation.

Pluralistic/multicultural teaching approaches aim to reach innovative solutions to new educational requirements of a multicultural and multilingual society (Galante & Cruz, 2021). Pluralism, as a multilayered concept, refers to a context in which different languages, cultures, viewpoints, thoughts, ideas, values, norms, races, and political arrangements, among other things, co-exist peacefully (Hongladarom, 2011). In pluralism, diversity, not similarity, is the foundation of growth. As an outcome of our social system complexity, pluralism is a democratic principle in the sense that it combines diversities well (Colombo, 2013). Interestingly, pluralism goes beyond the co-existence of pluralities towards the combination of pluralities to support the idea that difference is better than similarity, and that difference is a value that is more profitable than homogeneity (Colombo, 2013). Pluralism is a social involvement model wherein any specific social configuration is limited rather than open (McConnell, 2008).

## **2. Critical pedagogy and the education system**

According to academic literature, critical pedagogy can be defined as a “philosophical framework in the field of education that has emerged by incorporating and employing principles derived from critical theory” (Kincheloe et al., 1997). This approach perceives the act of teaching as inherently political, challenging the notion of knowledge neutrality, and emphasizing that topics of social justice and democracy are inseparable from the processes of teaching and learning (Giroux, 2007). Critical Pedagogy, commonly linked to renowned educational theorists Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux, is a compelling educational framework that warrants thorough examination. Its fundamental principles are not readily apparent and could therefore significantly alter one's perspectives on education, society, and power dynamics.

According to Freire (1996), language teaching cannot be free from the influence of ideology and power. The proposition entails the teaching of original languages to ethnic minorities. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of cultivating an appreciation for the aesthetic and intrinsic worth of these minority languages, in parallel with the dominant language of the host society. Furthermore, it is recommended to offer guidance in the dominant language to individuals, allowing them to proficiently engage in socially acceptable communication and effectively express views that will contribute to their quest for liberation.

### 3. English hegemony

Tsuda (2008) defines English hegemony as the prevailing dominance of the English language over other languages in the realm of communication, resulting in the emergence of the English Divide, which encompasses the disparities experienced by individuals who are proficient in English. He assumed that the dominance of English poses a potential threat to other linguistic systems, leading to discrimination against those with less command of English well. This phenomenon gives rise to a division known as the English divide, wherein English speakers wield greater influence and have access to more resources than non-English speakers. Tsuda identified three strategies for addressing issues related to the dominance of English with the aim of fostering more equitable communities. These strategies include: 1) The monolingual approach, 2) The multilingual approach, and 3) The global scheme approach. The researcher's focus in this study is on the utilization of a multilingual approach. This approach places significant emphasis on the construction of equitable dynamics among various languages (Tsuda, 2008). The rationale for this perspective is the belief that achieving equal status among different languages will foster equality in communication and promote egalitarianism.

### 4. From bilingualism to multilingualism to plurilingualism

There is a fear of integration and communication at both the macro (societal) and micro (personal) levels. Several reviews (Darcy, 1963; Peal & Lambert, 1962) reveal that for at least 150 years, the idea that monolinguals are superior to bilinguals was accepted without question. According to studies conducted in the nineteenth century, “a bilingual child's intellectual and spiritual growth would be halved, certainly not doubled” (Baker, 1988, p. 9). Studies conducted after the turn of the century suggested “a facility in two languages reduces the amount of room or power available for other intellectual pursuits” (Baker, 1988, p. 10).

This idea persisted until the very end of the 20th century, way after the groundbreaking research on bilingual children by Peal and Lambert in 1962. The work of Peal and Lambert validated the advantages of bilingualism and paved the way for the idea of a person possessing more than one type of intelligence. According to their findings, being bilingual boosted one's (1) ability to switch gears quickly, (2) ability to think abstractly, (3) ability to generate superior concepts, (4) exposure to a richer, more diverse bicultural milieu, and (5) verbal IQ (Baker, 1988, p. 17). Peal and Lambert were not alone in advocating for a fresh approach to language study. Wandruska's (1979) visionary work revealed that native German speakers often use multiple dialects in everyday life, highlighting the fact that each language is a constantly evolving entity.

Such an innovative study would prove fruitful in the long run, particularly if more than two languages were taken into account, broadening the focus from bilingualism to multilingualism. Several novel ideas have been offered since the 1990s. The concept of multi-competence, first introduced by Cook (1992) in English-language literature, marked a watershed moment. Later, in reference to a particular setting (Wales) and practice, the term translanguaging was coined (Williams, 2002). From the more radical position of Makoni and Pennycook (2007), who view languages as developed phenomena that have to be “disinvented,” we have seen terms like code-meshing (Canagarajah, 2006), transidiomatic practices (Jaquemet, 2005), polylingualism (Jrgensen, 2008), and a broader vision of translanguaging

(García, 2009; Creese & Blackledge, 2010). All these ideas have helped understand linguistic diversity and bring attention to problems associated with multilingualism. In particular, they have argued against the generally held belief of languages as distinct entities that could not coexist. The term "multilingualism" has been shown to be inadequate for conveying the comprehensive and mixed nature of linguistic events and practices, as well as the dynamic nature of language use. Due to this, some researchers have offered two distinct perspectives on multilingualism: atomistic and integrative (Cenoz, 2013, p. 10), with the latter going beyond the traditional approach of treating languages independently. Some go even further, questioning the conceptual premises of prefixes like multi-, pluri-, inter-, or cross- (Blommaert, 2012).

Plurilingualism also emerged amid all this, founded in the research that led to The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, or CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). As Gogolin (1994) puts it, "the monolingual disposition" is when languages are studied independently, with researchers focusing "on the minority of the world's population —monolingual or mainly monolingual speakers— [driven by the idea that] only when we find how 'things work' in monolingual speakers-listeners will we be able to generalize the results to speakers of more than one language" (Pavlenko, 2005, p. 6). Because of this, "plurilingual practices and knowledge have not been able to flourish". According to Canagarajah and Liynage (2012), the prevalence of monolingual notions has hindered a full understanding and recognition of the significance of plurilingualism.

Upon presenting an overview of the theoretical foundations of multilingualism and plurilingualism, the researcher will now proceed to examine these two concepts.

Before this, it is important to define monolingualism as the opposite of multilingualism and plurilingualism. Cook (2001) defines monolingualism as a prominent style of language teaching in which the first language (L1) is treated as playing a negative role in the EFL classroom, because maximum exposure to the target language is the ultimate goal in this approach. In its extreme form, monolingualism bans all usage of the L1. Cook argues that this approach is only practical only in cases where the mother tongues of learners are different and/or the teacher's L1 is different from that of students.

However, recently, the acquisition of a third language and trilingual educational contexts have become the norm in different societies. For instance, France has expressed its intention to encourage plurilingualism as a means to meet the challenges posed by globalization (Piquemal & Renaud, 2006). Another example could be China (Li, 2013), as the postcolonial language policy of Hong Kong, commonly referred to as 'biliteracy and trilingualism', recognizes the equal importance of both Chinese varieties plus English in the region. Due to growing international mobility, an EFL classroom wherein students have the same mother tongue and cultural background is far from reality (Abney & Krulatz, 2015). But, with the presence of migrants in different societies, authorities have resorted to different language support systems to develop the target language of students and simultaneously encourage home language maintenance (Abney & Krulatz, 2015).

According to Marshall and Moore (2016), plurilingualism is concerned with the study of the repertoire and agency of individuals in several languages in different situations where the individual is a contact center and actor. Consequently, an individual's cultures and languages interconnect over time and

change under the impact of their origin, social history, and life paths. Therefore, it is imperative to reevaluate multilingual identities, as they can greatly contribute to fostering substantial intercultural comprehension while alleviating miscommunication (Cai et al., 2023).

Plurilingualism and multilingualism are similar in some respects. Both are sociolinguistic phenomena in contact conditions, where individuals use two or more languages in their interactions (Chabert, 2018). Plurilingualism goes beyond multilingualism because it covers issues related to social action, personal agency, identity, and performativity beside language plurality (Chabert, 2018). Social and individual notions are the main point of difference between the pluri and the multi; While multilingualism involves the study of societal contact, plurilingualism refers to the study of individuals' repertoires and agency in several languages (Chabert, 2018). As distinguished by the Council of Europe, multilingualism involves the presence of different languages in a geographical area; but plurilingualism is an individual's command of various languages. The two terms are commonly used interchangeably, as is the case in the present paper.

In a similar line of argument, the influence of multilingualism and multiculturalism on individuals' lives in both educational and general aspects has been stated as an important outcome of globalization. Contemporary societies are seldom homogenous. Diversity is there in the languages used, cultures, or ways of living and expressing oneself (King, 2017).

## 5. Critique

Rooted in Marxist and neo-Marxist theory and as the manifestation of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, critical pedagogy means being critically aware of the constructed nature of human institutions, relationships, knowledge, and education, and helping learners to become aware of them. It is a transformational response to institutional and ideological domination (Gruenewald, 2003). However, as stated by Breuing (2009), there are multiple and varied definitions of critical pedagogy in the literature. As stated earlier, critical pedagogy is the opposite of English hegemony, and this is where multilingualism and plurilingualism come into play. This section of the study entails a more thorough examination of the consequences and constraints associated with the implementation of multilingualism and plurilingualism in the EFL classroom. While multilingualism and plurilingualism approaches present various benefits, they also present obstacles that require careful examination.

The sociopolitical backdrop of the educational system is a significant obstacle to the successful implementation of plurilingualism and multilingualism in the EFL classroom. In numerous geographical areas, there is a significant impetus to prioritize English language competency as a mechanism for societal and economic progress. The observation provided by the English Cambridge Assessment (2018) report highlights the evident manifestation of this phenomenon through the global language preferences. In a study conducted by King et al. (2010), a sample of non-linguistic-background students from mainland Europe were interviewed. The findings of the study unequivocally demonstrated the prominent influence of the English language on these students. Based on Eurostat data, English emerged as the predominant language that students were required to acquire throughout the majority of European Union member states in 2006/7 (Eurydice, 2008, p. 45). On a global scale, it has been estimated that two billion individuals, which accounts for one-third of the global population,

are engaged in the process of acquiring proficiency in the English language. China and India are often characterized as engaging in a competitive endeavor to invest in the promotion and acquisition of English language education (Graddol 2006, 2010; LoBianco et al., 2009). English is considered the primary foreign language in all secondary school curricula, even in nations that have been expressing opposition to the dominant influence of the United States, such as Iran. I believe that the prioritization of English hegemony may result in the disregard or depreciation of students' mother tongues or other languages within their linguistic repertoire. It is imperative for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to gain an understanding of the inherent power dynamics involved and actively strive to foster linguistic diversity while also upholding the significance of English as a universally recognized lingua franca.

Critical pedagogy, multilingualism, and plurilingualism are all in support of developing criticality and critical thinking in EFL learners. For Freire (1970), critical pedagogy is concerned with the development of critical consciousness. He equates freedom with the recognition of a system of oppressive relations in the world and the identification of one's own place in this system. Making the members of the oppressed group critically conscious of their place is the starting point of liberty. Freire also deals with the notion of literacy by defining illiteracy as the absence of reading and writing skills and a feeling of powerlessness and dependency. He recommends an adult literacy campaign to address this issue, and his suggested method is dialogue. Literacy education is a primary form of cultural action and must link speaking to reality transformation. Besides reforming the mind, the habits, institutions, ideologies, and relations that create oppressed thinking must also be transformed. The transformation of inequitable, undemocratic, or oppressive institutions and social relations is the primary concern of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy should deal with the notion of cultural politics by both questioning and challenging cultural experiences that constitute the histories and social realities that in turn shape the forms that give meaning to the lives of learners (Freire, 1970).

In summary, Freire's viewpoint on critical pedagogy is in accordance with the analysis presented in this review, which explores the incorporation of plurilingualism and multilingualism within the EFL instructional setting. Educators that embrace a critical pedagogical framework have the capacity to actively participate in cultural politics, deconstruct linguistic power dynamics, and establish an inclusive educational setting that appreciates the many language backgrounds and cultural encounters of their students.

Furthermore, multilingualism and plurilingualism are pinned upon critical pedagogy since both are tied to post-modern thinking, which has its roots in the theories and ideas of French philosophers like Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Julia Kristeva. According to post-modern theories, truth and knowledge are constructed entities, and there is no ultimate truth or objective knowledge (Webster, 2007). The post-modern view of knowledge rejects the idea of universal principles and values that all human beings all over the world should follow. In post-modernism, knowledge is personal, not impersonal; education and assessment systems must be fundamentally transformed; students' wants should be taken into account; and alternative forms of assessment such as dynamic assessment should be increasingly used (Webster, 2007). Parallel with these arguments, in multilingualism and plurilingualism, no single language and its associated knowledge, culture, and value system are superior to any other language, and all languages are equally

valid, valuable, and prestigious. I assume that the use of plurilingual and multilingual pedagogies in education empowers learners via acknowledging the inherent worth of their linguistic diversity and questioning the concept of an absolute truth or objective knowledge within the realm of language instruction.

The aforementioned rationales, along with additional considerations that may arise, provide compelling justification for the use of multilingualism and plurilingualism within the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructional setting. Today's generation of learners cannot be satisfied with limitations and constraints in different forms, including monolingualism. However, some arguments in support of monolingualism need to be further considered.

The presence of multilingualism and plurilingualism in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, although well-intentioned, reveals significant discrepancies and conflicts that necessitate attention and resolution. The subsequent section delineates several crucial topics of concern.

The concept of theoretical ambiguity can be traced back to Marxist and neo-Marxist theories, where the endorsement of multilingualism and plurilingualism can be interpreted as a response to the dominant influence of the English language. However, this gives rise to a crucial inquiry: Does the incorporation of plurilingualism represent an authentic recognition of linguistic diversity, or is it merely a response to the current system? The theoretical foundation exhibits a complex nature and occasionally presents conflicting aspects, indicating a dearth of coherence in the fundamental philosophical framework.

In addition, the adoption of plurilingualism and multilingualism is hindered by significant sociopolitical obstacles. The emphasis placed on developing English language proficiency at a worldwide level is not only a matter of policy, but rather a manifestation of ingrained cultural beliefs and the interplay of global economic forces. The proposition to advocate for the elimination of English dominance in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) schools appears to disregard the complex interplay of historical, cultural, and political factors that have influenced the existing linguistic context.

*Disregarding the Monolingual Perspective:* The criticism of monolingualism, although justified in emphasizing the significance of varied linguistic repertoires, neglects certain pragmatic factors, such as the association between monolingualism and the acquisition of children's first language (Cook, 2001). The complete rejection of monolingual ways seems to be a reflexive response rather than a comprehensive comprehension of the pedagogical reasoning behind such methods.

*The Complexity of Implementation:* The inclination towards embracing multilingualism and plurilingualism seems excessively optimistic, disregarding the many intricacies and contextual interdependencies entailed in the execution of this strategy. Although the Greek and European education systems have achieved certain accomplishments, it would be very simplistic to assume that these approaches can be universally applied on a worldwide level. The presence of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, governmental frameworks, and educational infrastructure across different locations can pose significant obstacles that are difficult to overcome.



There is a potential danger of oversimplifying the intricate nature of multilingualism and plurilingualism by exclusively associating them with post-modern thought. Languages encompass not only lexical elements, but also encompass comprehensive perspectives, historical narratives, and intricate power structures. The proposition that assigns equal validity, value, and prestige to all languages may fail to acknowledge the intricate dynamics of power, identity, and cultural hegemony that influence our understanding of languages.

*The Limitations of Critical Pedagogy:* Finally, it might be argued that the utilization of critical pedagogy as a theoretical framework for the integration of multilingualism and plurilingualism may possess certain constraints. Although the proposed approach presents a paradigm shift in addressing issues of power imbalance, it may lack sufficient pragmatic directives for effectively navigating the complexities inherent in real-life educational institutions.

## 6. Conclusion

Plurilingualism and multilingualism should be encouraged in the EFL classroom to enhance students' awareness of and interest in different languages. Frigolé and Tresserras (2023) argue that to promote a plurilingual and intercultural education, foreign language instructors should actively promote the utilization of students' native languages within the classroom setting. English hegemony blocks the path of multiculturalism; therefore, it should be removed from EFL classrooms as much as possible. This stance is intensified when different languages are considered helpful resources for learning the target language (Cook, 2001).

Research evidence has revealed pedagogical advantages to students' resorting to their linguistic repertoires in EFL learning (Moore, 2016). However, implementing this approach in EFL classes is not a straightforward task and is heavily context-dependent (Cook, 2001; Boeckmann, 2012).

Linguistic diversity has more benefits than linguistic uniformity, and that step should be taken to make it easier for a plurilingual or multilingual approach to be used in education, especially in places where the monolingual approach is still the norm. According to Llompart et al. (2023), aligned with the paradigm shift towards multilingualism and recognition of the pivotal role of teachers in fostering and implementing Language Supportive Teaching (LST), European initial teacher education (ITE) programs have incorporated linguistic and cultural diversity as an integral element within their curriculum. Also, in Greek education system, Gkaintartzi et al. (2023) devised a Greek language program that aimed to facilitate the implementation of pedagogical translanguaging. The objective of this program was to assist teachers in challenging dominant monolingual instructional practices and leveraging the diverse linguistic repertoires of children. Educators received training in the utilization of arts-based learning and the cultivation of creativity. The application of critical pedagogy to solve this dilemma necessitates a reframing of education through the prism of multiculturalism. However, this cannot be materialized overnight globally, and needs a paradigm shift in different systems of education, at least in those settings where monolingualism is present. This is a field which needs further exploration by future researchers.

In conclusion, it can be inferred that the information presented supports the notion that the topic at the incorporation of plurilingualism and multilingualism into the English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

classroom is unquestionably a captivating and groundbreaking concept. This offers a chance to question the prevailing paradigms and cultivate an educational setting that is more inclusive and equal. Nevertheless, the aforementioned comment highlights the complexity associated with this particular undertaking. The presence of theoretical uncertainty, practical obstacles, oversimplification, and the limitations of critical pedagogy necessitate thorough and meticulous consideration.

This discussion transcends the realm of academia and has a paramount significance as it directly impacts the educational experiences of a vast population of individuals worldwide. The task necessitates not only engaging in theoretical discourse, but also employing meticulous, nuanced, and contextually sensitive reasoning. In order to move forward, it is imperative to acknowledge the inherent intricacy of languages and actively interact with them, viewing them not merely as instruments of communication, but as dynamic manifestations of culture, authority, and individuality. The challenge at hand is powerful, yet the potential consequences are of such significance that it is imperative to refrain from accepting overly simplistic resolutions. In order to tackle this problem, future academics should adopt a dual approach characterized by boldness and humility, acknowledging the intricate nature of the task at hand and the far-reaching implications that triumph could yield in the realm of global education.

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### About the Author

**Marzieh Ebrahimi** is a skilled research assistant at Kansas State University, pursuing her PhD program in Curriculum and Instruction, with her main research focus on implementing technology in education. Her research interests also encompass multiculturalism and pedagogy. As a graduate assistant, Marzieh is aiding with various Rural Education Center projects running at K-State university. Email: [marzieheb@ksu.edu](mailto:marzieheb@ksu.edu)