



UK-IL Expert Workshop

BUILDING THE MULTILINGUAL LITERACY BRIDGE

The workshop was sponsored and supported by Friends of Israel Educational Foundation - The Academic Study Group on Israel and the Middle East, the Faculty of Society and Culture at Beit Berl College in Israel. The workshop took place at Beit Berl on November 25-26.

Conveners: Anat Stavans (IL) and Julie Dockrell (UK)

The participants (in alphabetic order) at the workshop were:

Muhammad Amara (IL), Ruth Berman (IL), Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen (UK), Julie Dockrell (UK), Roberto Fillipi (UK), Susan Jones (UK), Li Wei (UK), Victoria Murphy (UK), Jane Oakhill (UK), Elite Olshtain (IL), Dorit Ravid (IL), Batia Seroussi (IL), Bernard Spolsky (IL), Anat Stavans (IL), Emma Sumner (UK), Liliana Tolchinsky (Spain), Jeanine Treffers-Daller (UK), Bencie Woll (UK), and Sara Zadunaisky-Ehrlich (IL).

The aim of the workshop: was to bring together a multidisciplinary group of British and Israeli leading expert academics to address the key challenges that multilingualism brings to education in the 21st century. More specifically, to address the challenges concerning the monolingual literacy practices vis a vis the “new multilingualism” in children’s lives from the individual, societal, community and national perspective.

The centrality and worldwide growth of multilingualism has generated a new linguistic reality where research underpins practice and policy. The advances in technology, the ever-growing need of international communication and the readily accessible international mobility have all led to the need for people to have command of more than one language and often more than two languages. Though the existence of multilingualism as a lifestyle has prevailed among most of the world’s population from biblical times, many people today have and do function with multiple languages on a daily basis. Mobility has triggered languages to be in constant flux in form, function and use; the conservative hegemonies of languages is weakened when languages co-exist; and the new linguistic realities that form, due to languages undergoing changes, affect people's lives and their needs for communication – especially in writing and reading (and via cyberspace).

The motivations underlying the workshop:

Conceptual framework: It is quite common to find in many places in the world, also in the UK and Israel, two villages that may be located opposite to each other with a river, train tracks, road or valley in between. These landscapes are often seen from one side towards the other and while one may know very well the village in which one is standing, one can only imagine the village in the horizon across. Needless to say, building a bridge would not only bring the two villages closer and their inhabitants to socialize, but they will propel economic growth and commerce, transport and education, etc. In this sense, we view this analogy instrumental to embed two areas of research that have evolved over four or more decades each of which is the “village” across the river. On

one hand we have multilingualism and on the other side we have literacy. Both share some elements yet have evolved scientifically independently. This workshop will provide us with what



LITERACY

MULTILINGUALISM

it takes to build the “multilingual literacy bridge”, in such a way that while standing at any point on this bridge, the “village” of literacy and that of multilingualism will always be related and these relations will be dynamic depending on where we stand on the bridge.

The "villages" today:

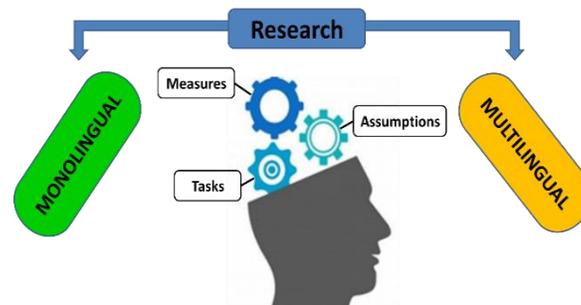
Multilingualism Village: The languages of a multilingual construe the linguistic repertoire of individuals in a manner that transcends the time and space in which each language, its forms, its functions and its use is manifest. Essentially, the individual is the vehicle of the language(s) that s/he commands and the master of its operation. Hence, languages are boundary-free and a-temporal and their use especially through the written modality is becoming more and more pronounced. In this sense, multilingualism and multimodalities of languages brought together are generating a new linguistic reality for many people in the world. The current linguistic reality in which we live is the unavoidable result of population mobility, geopolitical contingencies, natural disasters, and other life-threatening situations. Multilingualism, just as any language phenomena, is subject to change and adaptation especially in the spirit of modernity, globalization and rapidly evolving technology. One needs to go no further than one's own immediate social environment to notice that the language practices in general and those of young people in urban settings, in particular, are in constant change. There are new "multilingualisms" emerging, as the young people create meanings with their diverse linguistic repertoires using their eclectic array of linguistic resources to create, parody, play, contest, endorse, evaluate, challenge, tease, disrupt, bargain and otherwise negotiate their social worlds and their new identities.

Literacy Village: Literacy as a research field is truly multidisciplinary with foci on the cognitive, the social and the practices or a mix between them. Reading and writing are explored as separate skills or as two sides of the same coin, as processes of thinking, as social processes where the context of school, family, community are important actors, or explored as practices where people interact with texts throughout their daily lives. The definitions and perspectives in regard to the study of ‘literacy’ are still grounded mostly in the acquisition of the written language with a strong emphasis on reading (more so than writing), involving standards of assessment mirroring monolinguals and literacy acquisition in one language rather than multilinguals becoming literate in several languages. Moreover, where there is an attempt to study multilingual literacy, it is

predominantly in alphabetic languages (i.e. iconic or logographic writing systems are less prevalent) and mostly in mono-modality forms (writing divorced from reading).

The needed BRIDGE between the villages:

Various approaches to study multilingualism on one hand and literacy on the other, rely on similar prompts, tasks, measures and outcomes which often remain limited to an interpretation of either the multilingualism process through literacy products or literacy products that rely on monolingualism processes in multilingual individuals. Rarely, do we see the integration and conceptualization of methodology that integrates both. For example, literacy skills are often assessed against a monolingual model in terms of vocabulary (in the language targeted to render the written product), spelling (of the language targeted for the product) and even discourse and textual style (based on a cultural and stylistic paradigm dictated primarily by western thought) concomitant to an ideal lexicon and structure that typifies the end-state monolingual. A more overarching perspective that regards the multilingual literacy repertoire as one large backbone deposit from where the written forms of language may be motivated and drawn on spoken and visual grounded in several linguistic systems, or notational forms, or semiotic features, or even one's own meaning-making faculty, requires a change in paradigm.



The outcomes of the workshop:

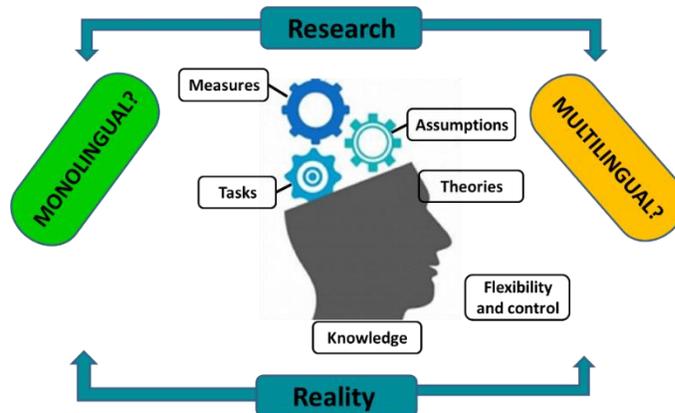
Immediate:

The workshop generated discussions among the participants raising issues that are particular to the different areas of research in terms of conceptualizations of the local (in the UK and in Israel) multilingualism and literacy issues in education, society and individuals. The workshop forefronted issues related to the ways in which language repertoires impact on all levels of ‘policy’ both implicitly and explicitly. The ways in which these issues were captured by both internal and external challenges (countries, families, society & individuals) were considered in terms of both social and cognitive factors. Of particular importance was the need to use models to frame our questions and related these models to the tasks which are used.

These issues were discussed in an attempt to generate a more glo(bal)-(lo)cal perspectives as to what needs to be changed, how is could and should be approached, what should be the future actions to be taken.

Short – term:

A website that will include all the presentations and the discussant session will be created and disseminated among participants for further discussion among the different stakeholders in the form of links to research centers, personal website links, organizations of influence and relevance among policy makers and educators as well as parent groups. In doing so we wish to amend the issues raised as aims above to include more specific actions as captured in the following illustration:



Long - term:

The expert group concluded (unanimously) that the new perspectives should be developed to consider the following issues:

- Cross-disciplinary communication and engagement in the present and with the history of our disciplines
 - The tension between meaning and types of meaning ; this needs to be linked to both previous research and philosophical traditions (Frege 1892)
 - The tensions between certain linguistic frames/types of multilingual contexts needs to be explicitly addressed
 - Research questions need to address the drivers of difference, not be satisfied with descriptive associations e.g. SES does not cause language challenges – poverty of the input
 - New theories are needed to test- develop- explore
- Who are our multilinguals?
 - Importance of Individual differences – linguistic, cognitive and social
 - Threats versus opportunities/positive and negative effects
 - Methods as a constraint – in terms of limiting what is examined and who the results can be generalized too.
 - Questionnaires/ surveys

Experts comments on the importance and contribution of the workshop:

- *It was wonderful to see everybody. I learned a great deal. Many thanks to Anat and Julie for bringing us together. We should stay in touch. Best wishes (Li Wei)*

- *Hi Anat and Julie, thanks so much for a most stimulating event, stimulating talks and discussions and meeting many new and friendly scholars from the UK with v interesting research!!! Thanks for organizing such a great event. (Elana Shohamy)*
- *Thank you Anat and Julie for a fascinating workshop in a beautiful place! Looking forward to seeing you all again sometime. Best wishes. (Victoria Murphy)*
- *Many thanks Anat and Julie for this very enriching experience and for the opportunity to meet such a unique caliber. Sorry I could not stay for the second day. The loss is all mine. Best everyone and warm wishes for upcoming holidays. (Elinor Saig-Haddad)*
- *Thank you Anat and Julie for organizing such an interesting workshop. It was enriching and hopeful. (Elite Olshtain)*
- *Thanks Anat and Julie for organising a fantastic few days! It was a real pleasure to meet everyone and I feel very lucky to have heard about all of your work. Lots of food for thought. Best wishes (Emma Sumner)*
- *Thank you. I found the workshop interesting and thought provoking. Warm regards to all, (Dorit Ravid)*

Thanks:

We would like to thank all the participants, Mr. John Levy, the SGME and the ASG for funding the workshop, Prof. Nurit Buchweitz (Dean) and Dr. Ronit Webman-Shafran (head of English Department) at Beit Berl College, Ms. Anat Benson (Head of IR), Ms. Hanik Josefson (administrative coordinator of IR), and Ms. Efrat Dvir (secretary, Faculty of Culture and Society) all the people who helped with the logistics.

Some memorable and important moments:

