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ALR special issue: Visual methods in Applied Language Studies

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Abstract: This introductory article serves two purposes. Firstly, it provides the background for the set of 11 articles that appear in the special issue of this journal and summarizes the articles along a number of dimensions. All the articles address aspects of multilingualism as subjectively experienced and they all make use of visual methodologies. Secondly, it subjects the articles to two meta-analyses. The first one compares and contrasts the studies by site: production, image and audiencing. The second one, in contrast, classifies the studies by the research strategy chosen by the researchers: looking, seeing or designing. The article concludes by pointing to future directions in research on multilingualism as lived, and suggests a visual turn.

Keywords: multilingualism, visual methodologies, meta-analysis

1 Introduction: Recent developments in the field of Applied Language Studies

Developments over the past few decades in the field of Applied Language Studies (or traditionally, Applied Linguistics) have been described in terms of *turns*, including

- the social turn (e. g., Block 2003)
- the narrative turn (e. g., Pavlenko 2007)
- the affective turn (e. g., Dewaele 2010; Pavlenko 2005), and most recently,
- the multilingual turn (e. g., May 2014 with critical contributions by Lourdes Ortega, David Block, Suresh Canagarajah and Bonny Norton, among others).

As a result of these developments, the traditional terminology used in the field (including mother tongue, L1, L2, L3; interlanguage, fossilization, native-speaker, communicative competence, etc.), the assumptions about the nature of

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languages as discrete and fixed units, and the understanding of what is involved in learning or using more than one language, or being or becoming multilingual individuals (in comparison to monolinguals) have been challenged. To quote Kramsch (2009: 2),

In its attempts to elucidate how people learn and use various languages, second language acquisition (SLA) research has traditionally given more attention to the processes of acquisition than to the flesh-and-blood individuals who are doing the learning. It has separated learners' minds, bodies, and social behaviours into separate domains of inquiry and studied how language intersects with each of them.

After reviewing some approaches in SLA, Kramsch (2009: 2) continues

not only has language been studied separately from its affective resonances in the bodies of speakers and hearers, but it has been viewed as a transparent and neutral tool for the formulation of thought, for interpersonal communication, and social interaction. In part because of the rationality of its grammar and the logic of its vocabulary, language has been taught and learned mostly as a tool for rational thinking, for the expression and communication of factual truths and information, and for the description of a stable and commonly agreed-upon reality. It has not been taught as a symbolic system that constructs the very reality it refers to, and that acts upon this reality through the categories it imposes upon it, thereby affecting the relation between speakers and the reality as they perceive it.

In brief, this is a call for researchers in the field to shift the focus to the *lived* experiences of those learning and using more than one language, or how they themselves make sense of various aspects of their multilingualism. The 11 articles in the special issue of *Applied Linguistics Review* are an attempt to answer this call.

Before taking a more detailed look at the articles, let us first briefly outline developments in the use of visual methods in the social sciences and humanities, which also form the basis for the articles in the special issue.

2 Developments/strands in the use of visual methods

The roots of visual methods in the social sciences can be said to lie in the anthropological work of scholars such as Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski. In studying indigenous communities, and especially the people in these communities, researchers used photographs as a way of documenting the research sites and capturing instances of the way of life there. Since these early studies, the use of images has spread widely; the interested reader can be directed to

wide-ranging reviews, e. g., by Holm (2008), Prosser (2011), Prosser and Loxley (2008), and Margolis and Pauwels (2011).

In language research, several strands of image-related research can be found. One prominent area is semiotics, where groundbreaking research has been done by Günther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (e. g., Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 2001), and Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon (e. g., Scollon and Scollon 2004). A recent development since these pioneering studies is the study of linguistic landscapes (see, e. g., Backhaus 2006; Laitinen and Zabrodskaja 2015; Shohamy and Gorter 2009). The studies in these research strands have focused on the place and role of language in defining and constructing our environment. The special focus in recent research in particular has been the multilingualism in our social spaces. People's experiences have not been the core focus of these studies.

Various ethnographically oriented studies have also made extensive use of visual methods. The earliest studies where especially photographs were used can be found in ethnographic literacy research (e. g., Hamilton 2000; Barton and Hamilton 1998; Hodge and Jones 2000). More recent ethnographic research has related to language use and multilingualism, and here visual methods have had a prominent role, e. g., in research on the multilingual practices of young children in an indigenous language context (Pietikäinen 2012; Pietikäinen and Pitkänen-Huhta 2013; Pitkänen-Huhta and Pietikäinen 2014); young people's language practices (Nikula and Pitkänen-Huhta 2008), multilingual language repertoires (Busch et al. 2006; Busch 2010), and language portraits (Farmer and Prasad 2014).

Apart from in ethnographic studies, the use of visual methods has become popular in studying subjective experiences of language learning and teaching and language use, as visuals are often thought to offer participants an alternative to verbal means to express their experiences and feelings and to reflect on their language practices, identities and learning and teaching processes. Photographing has perhaps been the most common way of collecting visual data, but drawing or other ways of composing visual images have also been used in language studies. Drawing has proven to be a very plausible way of accessing complex and abstract issues to complement the more traditional methods of data collection, such as interviewing. A number of researchers in our own research setting have made extensive use of drawings as methods of data collection (see, e. g., Dufva et al. 2011; Kalaja 2016; Kalaja et al. 2008; Linderoos 2016; Palviainen 2011; Pietikäinen et al. 2008).

The collection of studies in this special issue of *Applied Linguistics Review* take the developments outlined above a step further in that they respond to the call to focus on multilingual individuals' lived experiences and on

how they make sense of their identities and trajectories, language learning and teaching, and language use. The 11 articles (six in Part 1 and five in Part 2) focus on the learning and/or teaching of additional languages or on users of more than one language, and *their subjective experiences of being and/or becoming multilingual individuals*. However, since, as indeed we found, the issues handled can be quite sensitive and emotionally loaded, and therefore difficult to put into words, we had an additional mission: we wanted to explore the possibilities of using *visual data* in addressing the issues instead of relying on verbal data, whether spoken or written.

3 Summarizing the articles

The special issue of *Applied Linguistics Review* is an outcome of a call for papers we distributed internationally on visual methods in language studies. The call was positively received, with close to 40 abstracts submitted. After initial screening, we invited a dozen authors to submit full manuscripts for peer review. All the accepted manuscripts address topics related to the learning and teaching of additional languages, or being or becoming a multilingual person, and make use of visual material of one kind or another. Our goal in the selection is to illustrate cutting-edge research on language learning and/or teaching and use, with a range of visual material collected and analyzed, or produced in response to data in another mode.

Table 1 is a summary of the articles appearing in Part 1 and Table 2 of those in Part 2. The tables show for each study:

- its author(s)
- the context(s) of study
- the type of study
- the participant(s)
- the type of visual data produced
- the data analysis, and
- its main focus.

The studies in Part 1 have drawings or pictures as their main type of visual material, while those in Part 2 make use of a greater variety of visual data.

In Sections 4 and 5, we will subject the studies to two kinds of meta-analysis: the first one focuses on the *methodological choices* of the research and the second on the *strategic options*, including researcher position, by the writers of the articles.

Table 1: Summaries of the six studies appearing in Part 1.

Author(s)	Context of study	Type of study	Participant(s)	Type of visual data	Data analysis	Main focus
Inozu	Turkey, school	Qualitative	Young learners of English (N = 26), aged 6–6.5 years of English	Drawings (or self-portraits) as learners of English	Qualitative content analysis (with some basic quantification)	Beliefs held by small children about their learning of English as depicted in their drawings (or self-portraits) of themselves as learners of the language and regarding the context(s) of learning, learning activities/ practices in class, language use, identities, and mediational means
Purkarthofer	Austria, bilingual dual-medium school (German-Slovene)	Longitudinal case study (as part of a bigger ethnographic project)	Children (N = 4, of a total of 39), aged 8–9 years	Drawings of two spaces, home/family and school, and language practices within these	(Discursive) content analysis	Experiences over a period of time of using a number of languages (including German and Slovene) in two locations, home/family vs. school, as constructed in drawings by children
Ahn & West	South Korea, school	Quantitative/ descriptive (and a qualitative case study)	Young learners of English (N = 577), kindergarten and grades 1–6	Visual narratives (or drawings) of the Good English Teacher	Content analysis	The identity of a good language teacher (GLT) as constructed and depicted by young learners of English in their visual narratives (or drawings), with a focus on the teacher's approachability and associations with certain types of objects

(continued)

Table 1: (continued)

Author(s)	Context of study	Type of study	Participant(s)	Type of visual data	Data analysis	Main focus
Brandao	Brazil, teacher education	Longitudinal case study	Pre-service teacher of English (N = 1)	Visual narratives (or drawings or self-portraits) of a pre-service teacher	(Narrative) content analysis	The construction and reconstruction (over time) of the identity of a pre-service teacher of English as recounted in her visual narratives (in terms of a specific metaphor, “being invisible”) when involved in designing and trying out teaching materials of her own in certain classes
Perine & Ribas	Brazil, long-distance teacher education	Longitudinal case study	Pre-service teachers of English (N = 3 of a total of 29)	Visual narratives (or pictures) posted on an online discussion forum	Qualitative content analysis	Beliefs held by pre-service teachers about the learning and teaching of English as recounted in visual narratives (or pictures), with no changes (but reaffirmation) or some changes taking place over time
Chik*	Australia	Qualitative	Young learners of French (N = 17) or Japanese (N = 20), aged 6 years	Drawings (or self-portraits) as learners of French or Japanese	Compositional interpretation and content analysis	Beliefs held by small children about learning two foreign languages: similarities and differences noted in what was depicted, e. g., roles, contexts and practices/activities

Note: And two other projects summarized and methodologies and findings illustrated.

Table 2: Summaries of the five studies appearing in Part 2.

Author(s)	Context of study	Type of study	Participant(s)	Type of visual data	Data analysis	Main focus
Pitkänen-Huhta & Rothoni	Finland and Greece	Qualitative	Young people (N = 10 and 9), aged 14–16 years (data collected as part of bigger projects in the two countries and a few years apart)	Visual representations (or collages) of two languages, L1 (Finnish or Greek) and L2 (English)	(Discursive) content analysis	Comparison of language (L1 vs. L2) and literacy practices of teenagers in two countries as depicted in their self-made visualizations (or collages): similarities and differences noted in how they personally relate to the languages and their use in different contexts, including values and attitudes.
Becker-Zayas et al.	Uganda, school	Qualitative	Multilingual children (N = 7 of a total of 100), grades 3–7	Billboards about HIV/AIDS produced by children (official billboards as prompts)	Billboards produced by children compared for content with official ones	Multilingual children visually (not verbally) making sense of a culturally sensitive topic in society, HIV/AIDS, (and as an aspect of literacy): billboards produced by them – similarities and differences noted
Frimberger et al.	Scotland, UK, college	Interpretative	Students of English (N = 5 of a total of 19), aged 16–19 years, with asylum and refugee backgrounds	3D identity boxes	An attempt to explore an alternative research aesthetic	Poetic mappings by researchers (in the form of poems and vignettes) while students of English with specific backgrounds were crafting their identity boxes

(continued)

Table 2: (continued)

Author(s)	Context of study	Type of study	Participant(s)	Type of visual data	Data analysis	Main focus
Salo & Dufva	South Korea	Case study	Refugees from North Korea (N = 2) suffering from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	Self-portraits as multilingual subjects (present) and timelines (past) produced by participants	Compositional analysis and (narrative) content analysis	Experiences of multilingualism as recounted (visually) by participants in the form of language portraits and timelines: encounters with, learning, and using different languages in different contexts now and in the past
Tasker	Australia	Longitudinal, multiple-case study	Adult learners of Chinese/Mandarin (as part of a bigger project, N = 41)	Timelines (based on surveys and interviews) produced by the researcher	Developing a method to trace L2 learning trajectories (or histories) and illustrating how the method works	Tracing the chronology of decisions by learners to engage (or not to engage) in learning an additional language by type of activity: taking part in formal, non-formal or informal study, or none at all, over varying periods of time

4 Meta-analysis 1

In this section we present our first meta-analysis of the articles. In reviewing the methodological choices made by the writers, we will make use of ideas from *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials* by Gillian Rose (2013). The fact that the book is now in its fourth revised edition¹ is an indication of the popularity of the handbook as a resource for scholars.

The empirical studies in the special issue will be commented on by site (adopted from Rose 2013), where feasible: the site of production, the site of the image itself and the site of audiencing. In other words, the studies will be compared and contrasted for how their images have been produced, what they are composed of, and who serve as their audience – entitled to their own interpretations of the output.

The production of the images. For the 11 studies, visual data, that is, data in one specific mode and of one or more subtypes, have been produced either by

- the participants involved in a study or as part of a bigger project,
- the participants in cooperation with the researcher, or
- the researcher.

The production of the pools of visual data has taken place in educational contexts such as schools or universities, some with distance programs. Data have been collected from students of various ages: from young children to students in higher education. Geographically, the studies and the production of images have taken place on five continents, in various European countries as well as in Brazil, South Korea, Australia, and Uganda.

A number of means have been used to produce the pools of visual data, including:

- drawing pictures, either in a controlled way, with a template provided to produce, e. g., a portrait, or in a less controlled way, without a template,
- accessing a computer to produce pictures (e. g., image banks or software to produce images),
- making use of clippings of pictures and/or text from printed materials such as magazines, e. g., to compile a collage, or
- composing multimodal language learning histories, text complemented with pictures, sounds, etc.

¹ After finishing this introduction, we got hold of a copy of the fourth edition of the book from year 2016. In this version, Rose talks about four sites (the site of circulation added) and eight ways of analyzing visual data (digital methods added).

The visual data have been produced either at one point in time and place, or at more than one point. In the first type of study, the number of participants varies greatly, reaching a maximum of more than 300. Studies of the second type are longitudinal in their design and typically case studies, and in these the number of participants is quite small.

The image itself. The visual data or images are either black and white or in full color. They are also either

- two-dimensional, including drawings, pictures/images (often referred to as visual narratives), collages, billboards, Power Point slides, and timelines, or
- three-dimensional (or boxes, comparable to shoe boxes in size).

The visual material, of one or more types, is as a rule complemented with other types of data. Thus the pools of data are in fact *multimodal*, and contain also verbal data such as

- interviews
- surveys
- oral or written commentaries (referred to as narratives or meta-narratives from one study to another), postings to an online discussion forum, or poems and vignettes.

Audiencing. Audiencing shifts the focus from the producers of images to “audiences developing those other meanings by producing their own materials – visual and in other media – from what they see” (Rose 2013: 33), or, in our case, from the participants in the studies to the researchers involved. Of the 11 articles appearing in the special issue, 10 approach images from the perspective of the participants (and focus on their interpretations), and only one approaches them from the perspective of the researchers (and their interpretations). This is a study by Frimberger et al. The researchers were involved in a program targeted at a specific group of learners of English, that is, young people who had entered the UK without their parents and had applied for refugee status there. As part of the program the students had been asked to consider their lives and identities in an alternative way, i. e., by crafting 3D identity boxes (cf. official interrogations by immigrant officials). While the young people were working on their identity boxes, the researchers interacted with them, coming up against their limited proficiency in English. As a result, the researchers decided to try out another way of responding to the students’ art work: they composed poems and vignettes. These verbal (and emotionally moving) responses constitute the bulk of the article.

Data analysis. The multimodal data are subjected to one or two of the types of analysis reviewed by Rose (2013), either singly or in combination, depending on the type of data and focus of analysis:

- *compositional interpretation*: this is used to analyze aspects related to the composition of the images, or how something relevant is depicted (e. g., the size or placement of specific items or the use of colors in portraits of learners or teachers)
- (narrative or discursive) *content analysis*: this is used to analyze images for their content, that is, making sense of what they portray and/or how they might relate to the discourses in the context or in society at large.

In short, the focus of analysis varies from the form to the content of an image, followed by interpretation. Possible developments over time are noted in the studies that are longitudinal in their research design.

Overall, the 11 studies reported in the special issue make use of only two of the seven types of analysis reviewed by Rose (2013):

- compositional interpretation,
- content analysis,
- semiotics,
- psychoanalysis,
- discourse analysis,
- critical discourse analysis, and
- ethnography (used for the analysis of audiences, e. g., fans).

In addition, in one study (Frimberger et al.) the visual data serve as a source of inspiration for the researchers, who respond afterwards in writing to the 3D identity boxes produced by their participants. They do this in the form of poetic mappings, and so the initial pool of visual data is in fact left unanalyzed. In another study (Tasker), it is the researcher who produces visual data, or timelines, based on her participants' data in other modes (surveys and interviews) to trace their language learning trajectories over time.

Focus of analysis: issues addressed. What all the studies share is their focus on *multilingualism*, and importantly, as subjectively experienced or as made sense of by the participants (and in one or two studies as interpreted by the researchers): being and/or becoming multilingual subjects, acting as learners, teacher trainees or users with more than one language in their repertoires; language and literacy practices made sense of in school and out-of-school contexts or homes; identities constructed and reconstructed over time, or imagined (in the case of one study); beliefs held and possibly transformed in the case of a couple of the studies with a longitudinal research design.

What the studies also share, in our opinion, is a *mission*, in the sense that the idea has also been to raise the awareness of those involved in the studies, and of those reading the reports, of various aspects of being a multilingual subject by

- enhancing learning-to-learn skills and so making learners and pre-service teachers aware of their beliefs about aspects of learning, teaching and using more than one language
- making it easier for participants with disadvantaged backgrounds or who are now in challenging situations to deal with sensitive issues, traumatic experiences and identity (re)construction in another mode (instead of sharing these orally or in writing), helping them to visualize something that might have been difficult to put into words in any language, or in a language that would have been shared by those involved
- exploring further the possibilities of visual methodologies with some innovations, such as 3D identity boxes or timelines produced either by participants or the researcher to trace developments over time in the lives of multilingual subjects.

5 Meta-analysis 2

In this section, we approach the meta-analysis of the articles in the special issue from a slightly different angle, i. e., from the point of view of research strategies. This means that the focus of our analysis is on what the researchers seek to achieve by using visual images as a research tool, and how the relationship between researcher and participants is understood. This approach to the use of visual methods is proposed by Pitkänen-Huhta and Pietikäinen 2016, who divide the research strategies into

- looking
- seeing, and
- designing.

The first of these, *looking*, is typically related to the use of photographs as a tool to document observation or to produce data. In these cases, the camera lens provides a way to capture one moment in a process or one aspect of a context, for example. *Seeing* refers both to the physical observation of something and to the understanding or being aware of something related to what you see. This strategy is typically related to research participants using some visual means, e. g., drawing, to reflect on a phenomenon, inner feeling or emotion, or a process. The third research strategy, *designing*, takes the visual method further, to collaboration

among the research participants and the researchers, and to the agency of the participants to act on their reflections and produce something on the basis of the visibility. All three processes are also related to the degree of participation: “they form a continuum from researching somebody (looking at language) to researching with somebody (seeing language) to researching by doing something with somebody (designing language)” (Pitkänen-Huhta and Pietikäinen 2016: 5).

In this set of 11 research reports, the first category, *looking*, seems to be the most problematic. None of the studies can be directly placed in this category, as none of them really use visual means as a lens to the world in the way that a camera lens would do. The article by Ahn and West is closest to the strategy of looking. In their article, the focus is on young learners and on how they see a good language teacher. The researchers use both visual and verbal narratives. The visual narrative, i. e., the drawing the children have made of a Good Language Teacher, could be seen in the same way as a photograph of a teacher. The children are not reflecting on their own language use or their own language learning, or their relationship to the teacher, but they are visually depicting what they imagine a good language teacher to be like, i. e., how they see a good language teacher. The drawing itself functions as a lens into the children’s view of the world. The verbal narrative provides an explanation of their understanding of a good language teacher. On the other hand, one could argue that the children are reflecting on their understanding of a good language teacher and selecting features and properties in their drawing that they see as relevant to a good language teacher. In that sense the strategy is closer to *seeing*.

Most of the articles in the special issue would fall into the category of *seeing*, but they differ somewhat in how they make use of different types of visual materials. In a total of seven articles (Brandao, Chik, Inozu, Perine and Ribas, Pitkänen-Huhta and Rothoni, Purkarthofer, Salo and Dufva), the visual methods were used to enable the participants to reflect on their language use or learning, their identities as learners or teachers, or their relationship to languages around them. The visual accounts were collected as research data that the researchers – and in some cases the participants – explain, analyze and interpret. Often the visual data were further complemented by verbal accounts or narratives to provide a participant-oriented angle to the analysis of the visuals. Some of the articles used a very typical arrangement of drawings and verbal explanations (Brandao, Inozu, Purkarthofer). In these studies, the participants reflect on their teacher identity or they make sense of their language learning or their multilingualism.

Two of the articles (Chik, and Perine and Ribas) that we have classified here in the research strategy of *seeing* have extended the typical setting so that the visuals have been complemented with online discussions or blogs to enhance

sharing and commenting and to gain further insight into the participants' beliefs and practices. In addition, Chik collected computer-mediated multimedia language learning histories, i. e., she extended the typically used hand-drawn images as visual data. Salo and Dufva's article deviated from the others in that it made use of a blank template of a human figure, inspired by Brigitta Busch's (e. g., 2010) work, on which the participants depicted their languages by using different colors in different body parts. These data were further complemented by timelines to capture the participants' multilingual trajectories. Pitkänen-Huhta and Rothoni made use of collages rather than just drawings. The participants in their study were given a free hand to use any visual means they chose to depict their relationship to languages. In all of these studies, the use of visuals involves both depicting one's inner self by visual means and explaining the visual verbally. Thus, the studies include both a visual representation of one's subjectivity and making sense of it. The extensions of the typical hand-drawn self-portrait, such as multimodality and timelines, enhance the participants' possibilities of making sense of – or *seeing* – their language practices and language learning. These approaches also enable the researchers to capture not only moments but trajectories of language learning and use.

Three of the articles in this special issue (Becker-Zayas et al., Frimberg et al., and Tasker) would best fit the research strategy of *designing*. In these three the researchers and the participants go beyond depicting a phenomenon or reflecting on their relationship to something. In these three articles, the take on research is participatory, and the roles of the researcher and the researched are more nuanced and they involve the participants more than in the other articles in the special issue. The underlying aim in these studies is also to raise the participants' awareness of the issues being considered and empower them in their own positions. Frimberg et al. worked with young people with a refugee background and in their study they explore the researcher position in neomaterialist research. The research participants created 3D identity boxes and the researchers responded to the stories by writing poems. Here the visual identity boxes were not analyzed in themselves but they provided a space for the young people to depict their intimate, complex and sensitive life situations. For the researchers, the boxes provided a window into the world of the young refugees. Becker-Zayas et al. similarly approached a sensitive issue by visual means. Children in Uganda had first examined public billboards on HIV/AIDS and then produced similar billboards themselves; the purpose was to enable the children to communicate their social and cultural knowledge about HIV/AIDS to various audiences. In these two cases, visual methods offered a way of handling sensitive and even traumatic issues with a participatory and engaging research strategy. (In this sense, the approach in the study by Salo and Dufva is also participatory).

Tasker's study also adopted a designing approach but it differs from the other two studies in this category in that the researcher is the one producing the visual representation, rather than the participants. In Tasker's study, the participants produced verbal data on their language learning trajectories and the researcher turned these into visual timelines, with different colors indicating different kinds of engagement with language learning. The researcher and the participants then looked at the visuals together and the participants commented and reflected on the visual representations of their histories. This use of visual methods to describe and analyze language learning histories offered a new way of comparing individual language learning trajectories.

Our second meta-analysis of the articles revealed that visual methods were most often used for self-reflection and sense making. Even though the purpose of using visual data was similar in each case, some of the studies also extended the visuals to include different means and modes. There were, however, also articles in which the researchers sought to take a more participatory approach and engaged the participants in joint reflection and action with the purpose of raising awareness and increasing involvement.

6 Concluding remarks

Admittedly there are already studies in the field of Applied Language Studies that have made use of visual methodologies of one kind or another in addressing aspects of multilingualism as lived or subjectively experienced, but in our opinion these are still few and far between. There does seem, however, to have been a recent increase in the popularity of studies like these.

Based on Meta-analysis 1 of the total of 11 articles appearing in the special issue of *Applied Linguistics Review*, a few conclusions can be reached:

- **Contexts:** Most of the studies took place in just one domain of language use, that is, education.
- **Participants:** Most of the participants in the studies were children, teenagers and young adults in their institutional roles of learners, students and/or pre-service teachers.
- **Type of visual data:** For the most part, the studies made use of snapshots or still pictures (often referred to as visual narratives, though). This means they were 2D, and only in one case 3D.
- **Data analysis:** Out of the total of seven ways of analyzing visual material of one kind or another reviewed by Rose (2013), the studies made use of only two: compositional interpretation and/or (multimodal) content analysis.

- **Focus:** Overall, the studies did address quite a number of issues relevant to the contexts and participants and they did try to make sense of aspects of participants' multilingualism, including beliefs, language learning histories or trajectories, identities, literacies, and attitudes toward different languages in their repertoires.

Based on Meta-analysis 2 of the set of articles, we can further conclude that

- **Looking** as a research strategy was not common in these 11 articles. Only one article could be partly categorized as *looking*. This could be expected, as almost all of the articles used participant-produced visual images, and none used photography. This indicates that these studies examined the subjective experiences and beliefs of the (multilingual) individuals, which entails reflection rather than observation.
- **Seeing** as a research strategy was used in seven of the articles, whose main focus was on participant-created images with the aim of making sense of their identities, practices and learning. There were also interesting developments in the ways the participants were asked to reflect on their inner feelings, beliefs, and relationships (multimodality, sharing by online discussions).
- **Designing** as a research strategy could be seen to have been applied in three of the articles. Visual methods provide a good way of engaging participants in collaborative research.

On the basis of the two meta-analyses, firstly, we call for the diversification of contexts and the exploration of lived multilingualism in more than one domain of language use (i. e., not just school), with a wider variety of multilingual subjects (e. g., in age, gender, social class, roles) and with a broader range of languages in their repertoires (i. e., not just English as an additional language). Secondly, we urge researchers in the field to explore further the possibilities of yet other types of visual data (including photographs and moving pictures, e. g., *YouTube*), to try out other ways of analyzing visual material than have been used before, and to apply greater methodological rigor than before. We also call, thirdly, for research that adopts more participatory strategies that will engage more directly with the participants, to give multilingual individuals an active role in making sense of their language use and learning.

What became evident from some of the studies was that there are issues – emotionally difficult, culturally sensitive or psychologically traumatic ones – which are perhaps best approached by visual methods. It might have been difficult to talk or write about these, partly from a lack of a shared language or because of limited proficiency in a particular language, or, in the case of

small children, on account of limited cognitive skills. Visual methods provide an optimal way of engaging participants in creating their own understandings (and ways out) of their sometimes difficult life situations. Some people, it is true, love sharing experiences, be they positive or negative, by speaking or writing about them, but then again there are others who might prefer to do so using visual means of one kind or another. Now, in the studies in the special issue, the participants were not given much choice in this respect, since they were all more or less forced to produce one or more images. This is yet another issue to consider in future studies. Then again, allowing greater variety in the production of images might pose new challenges later on, that is, in the stage of data analysis. What also became apparent was the various ways of extending the use of visual images (e. g., sharing experiences in online discussions), and this is one aspect worth developing in future studies.

The studies in the special issue show in many powerful ways that visual methods indeed have a place in research into the personal experiences, beliefs and identities of multilingual subjects, and in helping multilingual people to make sense of the complexity of learning practices and trajectories. Visual methods offer researchers a way into the inner selves and histories of language users and language learners. On the basis of what we have analyzed here, and on the basis of the numerous other studies that have successfully made use of visual methods, we would be inclined to talk about *a visual turn* in research methodologies in Applied Language Studies.

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Bionotes

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