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**Author(s):** Melo-Pfeifer, Sílvia; Kalaja, Paula

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# Conclusion: Lessons Learnt and Future Avenues for Arts-Based Approaches in Applied Language Studies for Social Justice

Sílvia Melo-Pfeifer and Paula Kalaja

## 1 Introduction

This volume, *Visualising Language Students and Teachers as Multilinguals: Advancing Social Justice in Education*, makes the point that social justice in education requires a proactive, engaged approach, combining efforts of pre- and in-service teachers, teacher educators, curriculum developers, school directors, students, and other actors, inside and beyond the school and the higher education institutions. This is because the oppressive *status quo* is also collaboratively co-constructed and sustained, even if we do not see ourselves directly contributing to it and, paradoxically, even if we see ourselves as members of vulnerable communities. So, the first steps to address social injustice include, not only identifying stances and mechanisms of social injustice, but also reflecting on our own positionalities as researchers, teacher educators, authors of teaching materials, and as agents in other roles we are called to play in our daily lives in different contexts. It is not, we should make it clear, about making a *mea culpa* or engaging in penitence. It is about acknowledging that we might be talking from the perspective of the privileged, to say the least, and of the oppressors, those who in fact are not suffering injustices due to their linguistic competences. By naming the word *privilege*, we are not referring to material privilege, even if it might also be the case, as it often is, when talking about issues that evolve an intersectional stance to grasp the complexity of injustice. Rather, we are acknowledging the privilege of having the right to speak (with a job position and even with a contract to publish), of being in a position where we have been – perhaps randomly – spared the position of subaltern, of being able to write in the

academia *lingua franca* about the languages that constitute our being. We are acknowledging the overwhelming power of the symbolic privilege that comes with knowing the right linguistic codes (even if both of us are non-native speakers of English) and knowing how to use them to accumulate more symbolic privilege. So, while the discussion has been several times around issues of privilege attached to the native speaker, we might also extend the discussion to issues of privilege attached to being plurilingual speakers of prestigious discrete languages.

Are Sílvia and Paula just fake fighters of a fight that is not theirs? We would say that we are aware of the suffering voices and that, for us, ‘multilingual lives matter’ (Melo-Pfeifer & Ollivier, 2023). This means that we decided to co-edit this book not because we or our authors were personally affected by voicelessness or social injustice based on linguistic discrimination (which, one has to say, is attached to other domains of discrimination, such as ethnic origin or religious affiliation), but because we are committed to an agenda that we see as transformative for everybody. In this concluding chapter, we delve into a personal journey across the lessons we, as co-editors of this volume, learnt, and our very personal agenda for further research.

## 2 Lessons Learnt from This Volume: Social (In)justice through the Magnifying Glass of Linguistic Diversity

The first lesson learnt from this volume is that visual methods are but one way to address social justice and advance the agenda. We could even claim that it also brings some frustrations, such as the fact that it makes use of ocularcentrist approaches (Prada, 2023) to research, to language education, and to language teacher education. From this perspective, the first lesson is also the first frustration. A way to push the boundaries of this ocularcentrism would be to embrace *multisensorial approaches*. This acknowledgement joins the discussions about avoiding and/or coping with ableism in applied languages studies, as briefly addressed in the Introduction. So, even if visual methods have the power to advance social justice further by making research methods and products more accessible to a bigger number of individuals by giving a multimodal, visual voice to people who might lack a linguistic voice, we think that these might be combined with more multisensorial approaches, which are not bonded to eyes.

In this sense, other *arts-based approaches* can be a way to address some perceived limitations in visual methods. Nonetheless, the use of visual methods should be heightened in accordance with the aims of the research, the participants in the study, and so on. The use of research and teaching methods is not made in the void and depends on the repertoires of the participants, be those repertoires linguistic, spatial, sensorial, or other.

If we consider the three temporalities through which this volume was organised (see Introduction), we come to very engaging conclusions. First, in Part 1, on ‘Reconstructing Histories of Individual Multilingualism’, we could address multilingualism as lived by students and teachers, and the unpredictable ways language and professional biographies unfold. Visual methods were paramount to understand, for example, how students see the connections between the languages learnt and used at school, and those used in their social environments, in the study by Karita Mård-Miettinen and Siv Björklund (Chapter 1), or to understand how student teachers find their way to the language teaching career, in the study by Melo-Pfeifer (Chapter 3). Both studies make clear how the school curriculum and educational structures form students’ linguistic practices, in a way that the individuals themselves might see as detrimental or misrepresenting their own interests as multilinguals. In yet another study, Daniel Roy Pearce, Mayo Oyama and Danièle Moore (Chapter 2) discussed how native-speakerism has to be challenged in English language programmes abroad, even by native speakers themselves, so that they can be acknowledged as multilinguals and gain access to symbolic power that comes with it.

In Part 2, ‘Describing the Present of Multilingual Pedagogies’, the authors used visual methods to analyse beliefs, ideologies and attitudes concerning individual and societal multilingualism and how these carve teachers’ professional identities and actions. To give but two examples, Heidi Niemelä (Chapter 5) managed to show how language ideologies and beliefs about the national language intermingle with ideologies about the ‘other’ languages in the territory, and those beliefs can serve including or excluding agendas and lead to othering strategies. André Storto (Chapter 6) showed how school systems and schools can gain from giving students agency and opportunities to reflect on their own multilingualism, which might have positive effects on attitudes towards social and individual multilingualism, and therefore, on identities and social cohesion.

Finally, in Part 3, ‘Envisioning the Future of Multilingualism in Language (Teacher) Education’, the different contributions made us reflect on how visual methods can support teachers’ professional development by envisioning their future selves in action, either in multilingual settings or enacting multilingual pedagogies. Paula Kalaja and Katja Mäntylä (Chapter 11), for example, make the point that student teachers of English need to move from a monolingual to a plurilingual stance to communication in a diverse world, acknowledging the values attached to going beyond the learning and use of one variety of English. In Chapter 13, Maria Ruohotie-Lyhty, Rodrigo Camargo Aragão and Anne Pitkänen-Huhta, based on their comparative study between student teachers’ beliefs about multilingualism in Finland and Brazil, conclude that there is not a *one-fits-all* approach in the planning and implementation of multilingual pedagogies, as these are sociopolitically, educationally and economically context-sensitive.

It is time to take stock of the publication of this volume and reflect on how we see its contribution to applied language studies, in general, and to language education and teacher education, in particular. We mostly like to acknowledge that the different contributions were able to:

- bring questions of social justice to research and to language (teacher) education practices and scenarios, by means of visual methods, both as a way to uncover social injustice anchored in language use and plurilingual repertoires, and as a way to possibly address them;
- challenge logocentric conceptions of communicative repertoires and engage with current research trends to expand the notion of multilingualism by interconnecting it to multisensorial, spatial, bodily and semiotic repertoires;
- put teachers' reflexivity at the centre of a transformative process related to the conceptualisation, implementation and assessment of multilingual pedagogies, which are responsive to linguistic and cultural dynamics and changes at different levels: societal, classroom and individual. Those transformative processes were observed from the perspective of teacher professional development and/or considering the potential of multilingual pedagogies to transform the language classroom and school, as social structures, embedded in (language) power dynamics;
- create moments of cognitive and affective dissonance in pre-service and in-service teacher programs, by engaging participants in discussions about the tensions underlying multilingual education and the mechanisms that create and reproduce social injustices through languages;
- use visual methods to achieve a rich and nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between multilingualism and social justice, showing ways to transform the results into powerful tools for advocacy and student and teacher awareness-raising;
- pinpoint the need to be methodologically innovative if researchers want to challenge the academia's ways of doing and its mainstream epistemic stances, and to advance methods in research that embrace a diversity of languages, languaging practices and strategies, and materialities, expanding what counts as data in research in applied language studies.

The contributions to this volume highlight the importance of addressing social justice in language and teacher education through visual methods, expanding the notion of multilingualism beyond language(s) and promoting teachers' and students' reflexivity and criticality. The authors of the different chapters, first of all, show how multilingual pedagogies, thematising and leveraging either individual or societal multilingualism, can transform language classrooms and schools, uncover mechanisms of creating and reproducing social injustices, and foster (professional)



identity development; and secondly, emphasise the need for methodological innovation, as using visual methods can produce nuanced understandings of the complex relationship between multilingualism and social justice language (teacher) education.

### 3 Perspectives for Further Research: The Need to Use a Kaleidoscope

We reviewed the lessons learnt from this volume in Section 2 of this concluding chapter. While we acknowledge that the book was able to show the connections between language and teacher education and social (in)justice based on linguistic issues, by making use of visual methods, we also see the need to complement the use of a magnifying glass with a kaleidoscope that will bring different, complex, and even more dynamic interpretations to this research field in applied language studies.

In this closing section, we would like to point towards the need to criss-cross categories leading to underprivileged positions and embrace more *intersectional perspectives*. From this standpoint, we claim that issues around race and ethnicity, religion (and we can even think of political affiliations), ableism, ageism, gender, social-economic status, should be added to the discussion about the intersections between multilingualism and social (in)justice. They are cumulative and not exclusionary (Piller, 2016). As the literature on raciolinguistics has been discussing, linguistic prejudices and inequalities are rarely just about languages (Rosa, 2019), as they are intermingled in broader paradigms of discrimination, at school and beyond school. These issues are almost absent from the studies presented in this volume. It might be seen as a strength to focus on an issue at a time, but it narrows down the interpretative framework: we probably need a kaleidoscope to analyse social (in)justice and not just a magnifying glass, based on linguistic issues. Following Block and Corona (2016), Melo-Pfeifer and Tavares (2024) also acknowledge that, in complex settings and when analysing complex constructs, adopting an intersectional perspective is important to understand how different characteristics and dimensions enrich, alter, and add to the dynamics between the others.

Social justice in language (teacher) education might also be dealt with through the lenses of educating for *sustainable development*, as many problems of our time are connected to issues of forced migration due to imperilled ecosystems and menaces to traditional ways of living. Dealing with multilingualism and displacement might thus be regarded from the critical perspective of analysing why classrooms are becoming more linguistically diverse, instead of always just stating it as a matter of fact, and acknowledging the inequalities provoked by global warming, deforestation, and destruction of habitats and ecologies of being and thinking. Education for sustainable development can thus refer to *sustainable*

*linguistic development* of displaced communities, meaning both providing schooling in the language of the host country, tuition of other modern languages, and protecting their linguistic heritage, while at the same time acknowledging that those languages might blend and merge during the learning processes.

Education for sustainable development can also be addressed in language (teacher) education (Burwitz-Melzer *et al.*, 2021; Surkamp, 2022) to illustrate how language and teacher education can be used to thematise pressing themes, such as inequalities in education due to linguistic repertoires, gender gaps, or unfair distribution of material resources. Education for sustainable development has been defined by UNESCO as an approach to education that allows ‘learners of all ages’ to acquire ‘the knowledge, skills, values and agency to address interconnected global challenges including climate change, loss of biodiversity, unsustainable use of resources, and inequality’ (2023). One cannot overstate the role of language(s) as constitutive of all approaches to education, at large, and in the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes, more specifically. Thus language (teacher) education should be seen as a means to promote education for sustainable development, respectful of linguistic diversities, and responsive to changes that might occur in the linguistic and cultural constitution of communities.

Research literature and empirical approaches connecting social justice, multilingualism, and education for sustainable development are still emerging. We claim that arts-based approaches, in general, and visual methods, more specifically, can play a role in connecting the dots, because of their potential for research, for being integrated in pedagogical practices, and for being part of transfer activities to reach lay audiences (through public exhibitions, citizen science, and other approaches to scientific knowledge transfer).

## 4 Conclusion

To summarise, the different contributions to *Visualising Language Students and Teachers as Multilinguals: Advancing Social Justice in Education* have shown the added value of using visual methods to research multilingualism (and multilingually) in language education and in language teacher education. The authors make it clear that visual methods can be a research instrument to debunk issues of linguistically-based inequalities (as a diagnostic instrument), as a strategy to cope with linguistic inequalities in the language classroom and in teacher education programmes (as teaching material), and as a tool to actively engage language students and language teachers in reflections on those issues (as a pedagogical reflexion tool). Visual methods can also become transfer instruments to reach out to broader audiences: the publication of this book is a step in this direction.

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