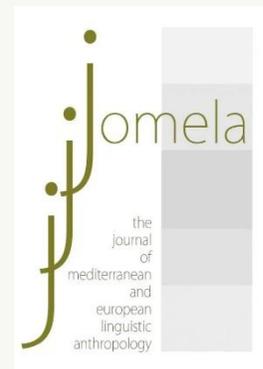


Unbounded Languages: Translanguaging as the New Language

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Mediterranean and European
Linguistic Anthropology
2022, Vol. 4(1): 19-33
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DOI: [10.47298/jomela/v4-i1-a2](https://doi.org/10.47298/jomela/v4-i1-a2)
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Abstract

With globalization, multilingualism has largely replaced monolingualism as the prevalent paradigm across the disciplines, from sociolinguistics to applied linguistics to education, giving focus to processes of superdiversity (Blommaert and Rampton 2011), metrolingualism (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015), and translanguaging (García and Wei 2014). Here, we are witnessing an era where multilingualism from below is increasingly supported by multilingualism from above in language policy and planning via plurilingual pluricultural competences (Council of Europe, 2018), via innovative language pedagogies such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010), and via innovative and critical uses of the current Lingua Franca, English (Seidlhofer and Widdowson 2009; Jenkins 2017). However, it is not just English that serves this purpose, but also French, Spanish, and Arabic in the Mediterranean region (Godenzzi 2006) or further afield, Chinese (Li, 2006).

Through the current study and manuscript, we seek to examine these new language constellations, by drawing on examples change to: based on a case study carried out at a small, private university in Spain with a strong international focus. Here, the university has a strong multilingual student population, and an equally multilingual / multicultural faculty. Superimposed on the already multilingual and multivarietal structure of the Spanish peninsula,

with its largest foreign cohort speaking Latin-American varieties, the languages and language combinations observed in this study include students' home languages, languages used during instruction in school and academic contexts, lingua francas, and also other creative language practices.

The study has ultimately purported to identify some affordances and some challenges in developing translingual transcultural competence (MLA 2007), that is, the ability to operate between languages, to reflect on the world and the self through another language and another culture, as well as to develop a critical language awareness and a strong and effective social sensitivity which is thus applicable in social and cultural settings, along with other contexts. This paper aims to document emerging language practices and translingual/transcultural competence, as well as the factors that support or hinder this development. Findings are based on surveys conducted among a variety of students who are taking courses from fresher to graduating levels, and from interviews and focus group interactions with students, teachers and administrators, as well as a document analysis of study plans and language requirements.

While English and Spanish are clearly the dominant languages in these demographics, third and fourth languages play a significant role among both these students and the faculty. It will be argued that translingual dispositions (Lee and Canagarajah 2019) are widely held in these communities, and that instead of cultivating a series of discrete linguistic skills, "translanguaging is the language of the future" as one of the subjects has suggested in our observation and data collection.

Keywords: *Translanguaging, transcultural, linguistic anthropology, education*

Introduction

Globalization, grounded in an intensified flow of populations, goods, and ideas, has upended traditional views, structures, and habits across the world. In addition to many others, these changes have also impacted such fundamental human characteristics as language, culture, and identity, which have shifted from significantly yet perceivedly uniform and prescriptive to fluid, multiple, and increasingly negotiated. Monolingualism has given way to societal multilingualism and to individual plurilingualism, thus inviting a growing potential for translingualism. The related translingual practices (Canagarajah 2012), the concept of translanguaging (e.g., García and Wei 2014), and the corresponding goal of translingual (and transcultural) competence (MLA 2007) have all contributed to the shaping of not only academic discussions but also of a classroom practice predicated on changing societal parameters. This translanguaging becomes pertinent to both the cognitive domain, the multilingual individual's set of idiolects (Otheguy et

al. 2015), and practice orientation, where multilinguals display innovation and creativity (Wei 2020).

Addressing translanguaging pedagogies, García and Kleifgen (2019) report a deeper understanding of readings, the generation of diverse texts, increased confidence, and heightened critical metalinguistic awareness among learners. However, Serna-Bermejo and Lasagabaster (2022) identify the teacher variable as more prominent than the language of instruction in their comparison of English vs. Basque contexts, and locate the emergence of negative more than positive attitudes towards translanguaging among both teachers and students. The evidence suggests a need for the fostering of translingual dispositions (Lee and Canagarajah 2019) that encourage non-binary, co-constructive subjectivities in speakers and their communities.

We as researchers are individuals who have multilingual competence and who engage in daily translingual and transcultural practices in our respective transnational workspaces. As such, we set out to investigate students' linguistic and cultural practices, the development of their translingual and transcultural competences (MLA, 2007), as well as as well as identity formation patterns in an internationalized university setting, in Spain. We further purport to identify affordances and challenges at times when students attempt to process and extend on their resources as speakers who can navigate the social and linguistic positions in a contemporary globalized world.

In a society characterized by superdiversity, increased mobility, and heightened individuality, it is incumbent upon educational institutions at all levels to lay out plans to support their students in learning, so as to enable them to operate between and across languages and cultures, to reflect on themselves and the world through the lens of other languages and cultures, and to develop the necessary level of critical language awareness and social sensibility to become global citizens (MLA 2007).

Literature Review

The shift towards multilingualism and translanguaging can be observed in the language paradigms and usage patterns of major languages, such as English, Chinese, or Spanish. While English as a lingua franca (ELF) (Seidlhofer 2001; Jenkins, 2006) has been documented as a language phenomenon often linked to academic mobility (Mauranen et al, 2010), Chinese (Li 2006) and Spanish (Godenzzo 2006), each as a lingua franca, have been described in terms of spread vs. variation, and as contact phenomena vs. language hierarchies, similar to the set of World Englishes (WE). With the 'trans' turn in applied linguistics, ELF has integrated superdiversity and translanguaging in its ever-evolving model, proposing English as 'Multilingua Franca' (Jenkins 2017). This framing is further in line with the accommodation principle

suggested as a mechanism central to ELF (Seidlhofer and Widdowson 2009), or alignment as proposed by Pennycook (2014), within a principled polycentrism that focuses on the resourceful speaker drawing on multimodal repertoires of the participants, according to their purpose and context, and to their social and physical space, rather than any shared code, to thus create a new multidimensional frame of reference.

With regard to language pedagogies, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has also been revised and updated so as to reflect the progressive turn towards multilingualism and its accompanying translanguaging, specifically with the new categories of plurilingual and pluricultural competence on the one hand, and also the consideration of mediation as a domain in its own right (Council of Europe 2018). A similar re-orientation can become apparent in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which includes pluriliteracies as a lens through which to foster conceptual as well as communicative development (Meyer and Coyle 2017). According to Coyle (2015), this pedagogical shift encourages learners to “purposefully communicate across languages and cultures (academic and social)” (p.13), a process which seems to tie in well with the MLA (2007) goal of operating between multiple languages and cultures, while using language to develop and to demonstrate the thinking and learning of students. Thus, multilingual subjects (Kramsch 2009) can attempt to apply their plurilingual repertoires to grapple with academic and social contexts via translanguaging.

As both the MLA (2007) with its discussion of translingual and transcultural competence and the Council of Europe (2018) with its notions of plurilingual and pluricultural competence demonstrate, language and culture are both essential to communication processes. Culturewise, Baker (2021) picks up the 'trans' thread with transcultural communication, reviewing transculturality (e.g., Appadurai 1996, 2010), critical intercultural communication studies (from Kramsch 1993 to Zhu 2018), and trans perspectives in linguistics (e.g., Hawkins and Mori 2018; Mori and Sanuth 2018, the latter illustrating 'transcultural competence' as laid out in MLA 2007), and suggesting the effective presence of spatiotemporal scales of culture that are heterogeneous, simultaneous, contestable, and contextual manner. These conceptually elusive ways of being, perceiving, and doing, can be traced back to Vertovec's (1999) notion of transnationalism “as a social morphology, as a type of consciousness, as a mode of cultural reproduction” (p.1), and resonate with Blommaert and De Fina's (2017) chronotopic identities that fluctuate according to specific intersections of time and space, particularly in contemporary 'light' communities based not on traditional sociological categories but on “transient criteria of lifestyle, taste, and political inclination” (p.12).

Methodological Framework

In the present study, we examine translingual transcultural (TLTC) competence by focusing on an example of three multilingual degree programs, at a small, private university in Spain, with a strong international projection, a multilingual student population, and an equally multilingual and multicultural faculty.

In line with grounded constructivist theory (Charmaz 2017), we adopted a multi-perspectival, mixed methods approach (Creswell 2015; Hocking 2014). We triangulated data from 66 responses to a questionnaire by students in significantly international undergraduate degree programs. In addition to this, we carried out six student focus groups, and conducted 23 individual student interviews, as well as eleven interviews with professors and two interviews with administrators, i.e., a Head of Studies and an administrator at the International Office at the university. In accordance with our translingual approach as researchers, we included three different languages (English, Spanish, and German) during the interviews, in order to cater to participants' preferences for language use during the interviews and data collection in general. Throughout, we present English quotes in their original form, despite the possibility that they may not correspond to standard usage, while we also translate all direct quotes in languages other than English. The speakers of the quotes below are marked in the following ways: 'T' for teacher, 'A' for admin, 'S' for student, and 'FG' for focus group.

Findings and Contextual Analysis

General

The institution pursues the aims of furthering global sociocultural development and acknowledges the more utilitarian need to prepare students for the global marketplace. Although the institution does not have an official language or internationalization policy, the teacher and student recruitment processes include special language requirements. The university's curriculum is designed bilingually (Spanish and English), with the addition of two other compulsory foreign languages, contains references to TLTC competences, and includes compulsory and/or optional study abroad periods. Students attracted to the degrees are highly plurilingual, that is, over 55% speak four or more languages, including the co-official languages of Spain. The academic faculty at the university largely display translingual and transcultural characteristics, which are frequently related to their international personal backgrounds, a characteristic which aligns with the hiring policy of the institution.

With regard to transcultural competence, two thirds of the students self-assess their competence as 'excellent' or 'good,' but their awareness of the need to improve transcultural competence is less developed than for the translanguaging competence (see Figure 1 below).

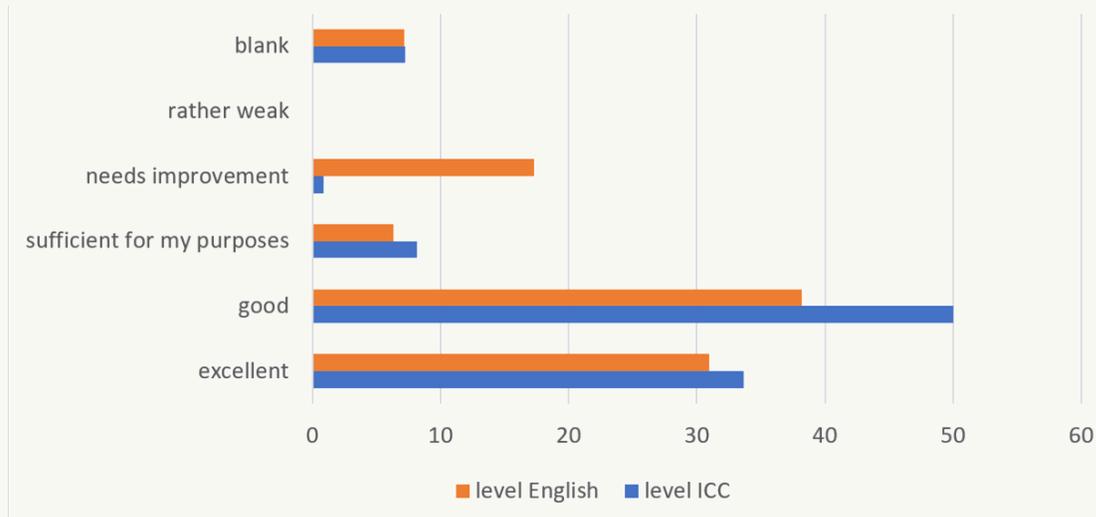


Figure 1: Student self-assessment of English versus intercultural competence

Despite the fact that students can at times demonstrate a high awareness of transcultural competence, and ascribe a positive value to this transcultural competence, only approximately half of these participants perceive themselves as part of a pluricultural community, a phenomenon which would contribute to their putting their transcultural competences into practice (see Figure 2 below). When comparing students in their initial years with those nearing the end of their academic studies, the university experience seems to have no impact on this perception, with first- and second-year students scoring higher than the final year students.

The teacher interviews support this imbalance of TC and TL competence, as in the following data:

T: The transcultural aspects still need to be developed a bit more. The interlingual one not.

On the part of teaching and administrative staff, there is a clear perception of institutional leadership promoting internationalization; however, there is also a general feeling of lack of agency, in that decisions are made and communicated top-down, which can result in resistance or ignorance.

A: Yes, this is an internationalized university. Especially the higher ups try to promote this very much.

T: I think there is support, but, for example, [extracurricular activities] is what students are asking me for; however, we cannot substitute a class for that activity, no, *the university does not permit it.* [authors' emphasis]

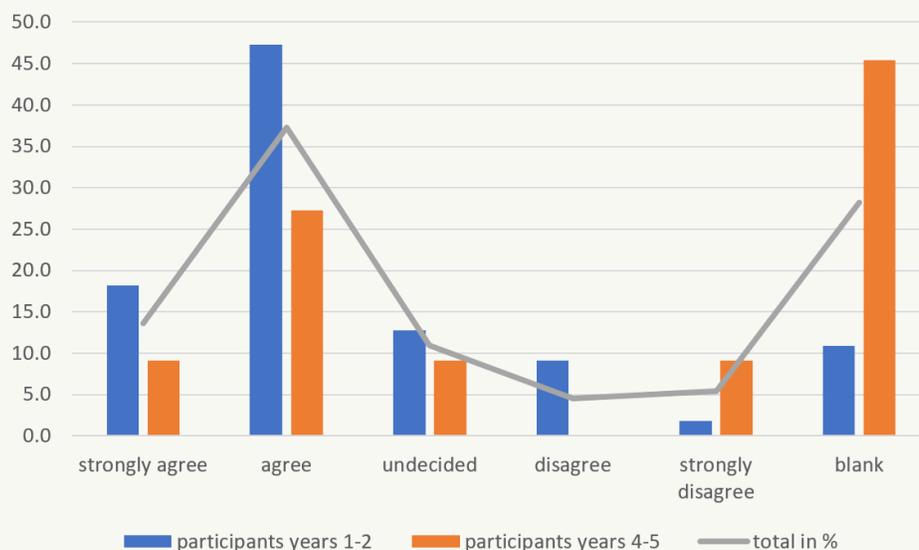


Figure 2. Student perception of themselves as members of a multicultural community

To sum up, the institutional context provides an environment that is potentially rich in opportunities: A plurilingual community, a pluricultural faculty, in-class learning in two main vehicular languages and two other instrumental ones, syllabi that prominently include TLTC competences, and exchange programs for both study and internship. In this environment, TLTC competences can be expected to prosper. In what follows, we present an analysis of student, faculty, and administrator perceptions of TLTC competence development during study.

TLTC Competence Development

In the environment provided by the institution, the different stakeholders interact in various ways, coinciding but not necessarily agreeing in their comments on the importance for TLTC development of mono- versus translanguaging communicative settings, on the integration of language and culture, on the reduction of cultural bias and stereotyping, on international exchange programs, and on the suitability of the resources at their disposal.

All participants in the study agree on the importance of foreign languages in order to facilitate the internationalization goals of the institution. Students share the institutional concern for the

importance of languages for their entry into a global labor market (S: French is the language of diplomacy and Chinese opens a door to Asia, key place in the future of International Relations). While first- and second-year students are mostly concerned with their language progress and the ways in which positive and negative interference can affect this, students in their final year show a more positive attitude towards and generally more interest in translanguaging.

S: I think it's amazing when a group of people alternate between languages and still manage to understand each other.

FG: We mix everything we can mix.

S: And so I tended to jump in between conversations in each three languages at the same time. And that was very, very good. It was very cool.

S: We all constantly internally interchange the other language because it's easy to just pick up the word in one language if you don't know it in the other or it doesn't pop in your head... This is fine. I'm a bilingual.

These students also differentiate more clearly which contexts translanguaging is appropriate in (mostly when socializing with their peers) and when to avoid translanguaging (in professional / academic contexts, or, with monolingual interlocutors).

S: I do it [translanguaging] a lot with my, with my university friends.

S: ... for example, at home, I use some words that I can use with my university colleagues because they know what I'm talking about, but my mom doesn't understand ...

FG: I feel like when we are interpreting or translating in class we know how to go from one language to another properly. I mean, at least for me when I am speaking for them and I say a word in English it's just because I don't want to think about it in Spanish and it seems more natural to me. But then in class I know how to...I'm never I don't remember this word, I don't know. For the moment I am able to do it.

Motives for translanguaging given by graduating students suggest a purposeful use related to factors such as audience, convenience, strength of expression, enjoyment of the process, need for mediation, and use of creativity.

S: I do it [translanguaging], but I try to control it depending on the audience.

FG: When I speak to them I always say some words like English verbs made in Spanish. So "update" is "updatar".

S: And it also happened to me: I had to use both English, well three languages, English, French and Spanish. Cause my mom's a doctor and we were in a mall and there was this girl who was from the States and she was pregnant [...] and she started feeling bad. ... So I went with them and I have to ask the woman in English what was wrong, translate it into what we interpreted to my mom's

Spanish and then talk to the security guy who was going to call an ambulance in French cause he didn't know English. And it was a very stressful situation because she was really feeling badly. But, I felt really proud because I was able to handle three languages at a time.

Teachers comment frequently and in detail on the advantages and disadvantages of a monolingual classroom and on the convenience (or not) of permitting translanguaging. For apparent reasons, this concern is more prevalent in the comments of language teachers, whose comments range from “I try to have a monolingual approach from the beginning” to the conscious use of a third language as a tool for expression or comparison. A similar disparity can be detected in the language use in content classes, where some lecturers take an ‘English only’ approach, often motivated by a wish to comply with the institutional instructions rather than any pedagogical considerations. In parallel, some content teachers allow translanguaging into Spanish so as to ensure understanding of content or to establish rapport with a student under stress. One teacher actively encourages the use of a third vehicular language in the classroom. A group of teachers are carrying out an innovation project on co-teaching, including the acknowledgement of experiences of two teachers with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds sharing a course and affording students with access to different teacher identities.

Regarding transcultural competence, both students and teachers agree on its importance, self-reporting a highly pluricultural profile. Though almost half of students have had experience abroad prior to university, and only 6% consider themselves monocultural, it still stands that the majority perceive themselves as bi- or pluri-cultural, and only 14% consider themselves as transcultural, i.e., as feeling confident when moving between both cultures (cf. Figure 3 below).

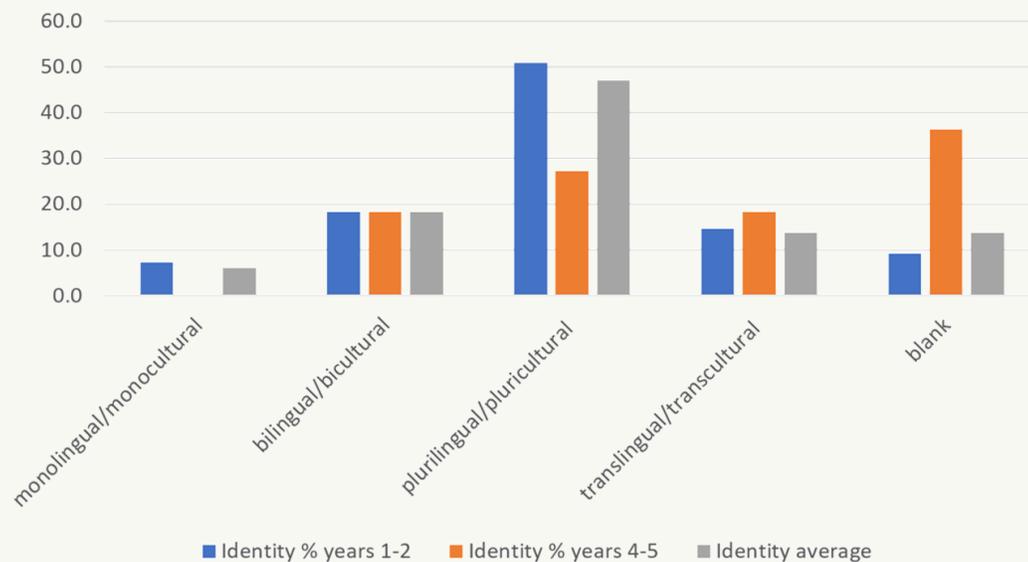


Figure 3. Student identity (self-reported)

Teachers frequently have extended experience in different cultures outside the Spanish national one; it is therefore not surprising that the teacher cohort and their community mostly reflect on the intricate relationship between language and culture. Language and content teachers differ in their attitudes, though; the former consider culture to be an integral part of or subordinate to language teaching, while content teachers prioritize culture, frequently taking language for granted.

The transcultural awareness displayed by students is grounded in values such as respect, empathy, being non-judgmental, being open-minded, being self-critical, and avoiding stereotyping and prejudice (cf. Fantini's 'attributes of intercultural competence' 2020). However, when eliciting specific examples, early year students frequently refer to superficial or 'visible' aspects of culture, such as food, mealtimes, or body language, and show little familiarity with issues of social justice or postcolonial criticality. Final year students display a higher critical awareness of aspects such as their own cultural filters and the role of language in these (e.g., accents as identity / power markers), as well as power issues involving inclusive and exclusive uses of culture (stereotyping, essentialism, and racism). Students discussed issues of 'political correctness,' commenting that Spanish language and culture are more 'direct' than for example US English and culture, leading to misinterpretations of Spanish calques in English such as 'talking like the Indians' [hablar como los indios] as (unintentionally) racist.

With regard to faculty, language teachers tend to include not only mainstream, stereotypical cultures, but also minority cultures such as the Turkish culture in Germany or the varieties of Arab cultures. Several insightful comments were made by content teachers, who demonstrated awareness of possible Eurocentric bias and, in one case, mentioned the positive effect of using a third language such as English in class: "... their mindset changes because they're are using an alien language to talk about an alien culture."

In addition to the teacher – student relationships, all participants mention the importance of either studying abroad or interacting with exchange students on campus as a key experience that was generally desirable. Both administrative and teaching staff were aware of the need for closer integration between national and international students, but felt insecure as to how best to achieve this. Several teachers' comments indicate that this separation also affects classroom situations, and only a few teachers mention active strategies for integration, such as forming mixed groups, or positioning the exchange students as sources of cultural information.

Both at the organizational and at the individual level, a considerable number of resources are dedicated to fomenting the TLTC competence. At the institutional level, this includes the provision of training in a third or fourth language during four years of study, the delivery of 50-80% of subjects in English as the vehicular language, the availability (and in several cases,

obligation) of an international exchange as part of the degree program, and a certain number of extracurricular activities related to TLTC, such as talks by experts, round tables, exhibitions, or debates. On the part of individual teachers, in-class resources such as textbooks, props, or audiovisual materials are mentioned, as are out-of-class activities, including going to the movies or to cultural events. Here, the teachers present a TLTC resource largely owing to their highly international profiles.

Discussion

The state of affairs described above may sound familiar to many academics or administrators working at higher education institutions where internationalization has become a key issue for both student recruitment and student training. The challenges include a lack of a clear language policy, a need for specific teacher training, time constraints, lack of communication, reduced agency on the part of the faculty, and a language barrier for content teachers. Students require more spaces and opportunities for meaningful 'real-life' TLTC interaction on campus, both inside and outside of the curriculum, in order to feel part of a pluricultural community. They also lack the ability to measure their progress in transcultural competence. All of these issues are in line with current research findings, and relate to the explosive growth of English-medium instruction or education (EMI, EME) (Macaro 2018; Dafouz and Smit 2020) at the service of the internationalization of higher education and the challenges globalization poses for both students and professors regarding language proficiency, biliteracy, and translingual and transcultural dispositions or teaching methodology.

In the face of these challenges, Baker (2016) proposes using a transcultural approach to language education in international universities with a multilingual and multicultural faculty and student body that needs to be prepared for TLTC interactions. In the institution under study, affordances available suggest an ongoing change towards a more fluid concept of language and culture, based on a strong positive value assigned to TLTC competence. Several professors interviewed displayed "an orientation towards language diversity and difference from a nondeficit perspective" (p. 352) as well as a "pedagogical enactment" (p. 355) of these (c.f., Lee and Canagarajah 2019), thus serving as role models of a translingual disposition. Similarly, while students in their initial years of study display an orientation towards a native-speaker ideal, final year students show a firm translingual identity and purposeful as well as creative use of translanguaging and mediation strategies, in line with findings by García and Kleifgren (2019) and Baker (2021), but in opposition to Serna-Bermejo and Lasagabaster (2022), who report primarily negative attitudes to translanguaging by both students and teachers.

The institutional context is rich in potential resources such as exchange students on campus, study abroad options, professors as TLTC role models, and plurilingual learning scenarios, and

has given rise to a series of emergent practices related to translanguaging and mediation in the classroom, thus dissolving the static concept of language and culture in a situation of creative tension between ‘fluidity and fixity’ (Pennycook 2007, p. 8). This was demonstrated by students’ identities which transcend the monolingual / monocultural status, but who have not yet reached a ‘trans’ consciousness. Opportunities need to be created for students and professors to further explore their chronotopic identities (Blommaert and De Fina 2017) and to hone their TLTC skills.

In order to systematize and generalize the individual or collective innovative practices detected, the authors perceive the need to develop a framework for teaching and assessing TLTC competence, building on the groundwork laid by researchers and practitioners such as Byram (2021), Chandra et al. (2022), Deardorff (2006, 2011), or Fantini (2020), but moving from a descriptive stance towards a performative model of TLTC competence (cf. Balboni and Caon 2014). We thus argue that our aim should include to make ‘trans’ competences mappable, teachable, and experiential, so as to move from a monolithic, bounded view of culture and language, towards a more fluid, contextualized one that fosters translingual transcultural dispositions inside and outside of the classroom.

Conclusion

It has been our aim to investigate the challenges and affordances contributing to the education of resourceful TLTC speakers in an internationalized higher education institution. Though the results of the present study can be extrapolated to other educational contexts, the study does present a series of limitations; firstly, as a case study at one specific institution, it does not aim to be representative, but rather an example of “how varied the interactional relations enacted in heteroglossic practices actually are” (Blommaert and Rampton 2011, p. 13). Secondly, the majority of participants, including the researchers, form part of a privileged, white, globalized educational community. While ethical and social commitment is part of the university mission, this stance emerges from a position of privilege, and cannot speak for the lived experiences of social injustice, systemic discrimination, cultural stereotyping, and linguistic bias. A longitudinal study is currently under way, aiming for representative numbers of participants for fresher and graduating students in the degrees under scrutiny, in order to allow for comparison between both cohorts and an analysis of the effectiveness of university study for TLTC competence development.

The results of the study point towards a need to systematize TLTC education in higher education, so as to increase visibility and accountability. To achieve this aim, policies and pedagogies will need to change at a scale larger than is currently the case, to break the mold, and to truly attempt to educate resourceful translingual students to develop transcultural sensitivity for a future with fewer social and cultural boundaries.

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