

ENGLISH(ES) AS (A) SEMIOTIC RESOURCE(S)/REPertoire(S): IMAGINE A MULTILINGUAL/MULTIMODAL TESOL

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As globalization and technological advancement continue to change our lives, more researchers have come to recognize the reality and prevalence of multilingual and multimodal communication in the classroom and numerous educational sites. English is not only a lingua franca/international language (ELF/EIL) but also a meaning carrier embodied in various modes. The concepts of translanguaging (García & Li, 2014), translanguaging practices (Canagarajah, 2013), and multimodalities (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) have received even more attention as the pandemic forced teachers and students to adapt to an online learning environment. In the digital world, it is more common for users to mix and remix linguistic elements and present them in multiple modes simultaneously. It may be argued that the pandemic accelerates the transformation of the conceptions of English from a property belonging to native speakers (NS) to a semiotic resource for all users disregarding their linguistic backgrounds. Thus, the publication of this special issue is a timely harbinger for the field of TESOL to deal with an ever-changing world.

The reconceptualization of English as one or more than one element of semiotic resources/repertoires has great implications for TESOL. Five studies are included in this special issue, with each situated in a particular context. They draw on theoretical ideas in global Englishes, translanguaging, and multimodalities to investigate the perceptions and practices of teachers and students as well as the hidden ideologies in policy documents. Below I summarize key findings from these studies to offer an overview of this special issue.

ENGLISH TEACHERS

In TESOL, the most significant social actor is the English teacher,

who to a great extent determines what students learn in the classroom. In this issue, the first study by Cai and Fang and the second by Lin both focus on English teachers' attitudes toward and practices related to global Englishes and translanguaging. Cai and Fang collected observation and interview data from four university English teachers (two in Macau and two in China) to analyze their translanguaging practices in class and perspectives on the use of multiple languages in the classroom. Their findings suggested that the participants' translanguaging practices, particularly the use of L1 shared by the teachers and students, functioned as protecting students' self-esteem, explaining terminologies and concepts, checking comprehension, and creating class rapport. All four teachers acknowledged the benefits of translanguaging in class management as attention grabbers or multimodal facilitators. However, the teachers also struggled to determine how to use L1 in their class as some were concerned about the demotivating effect in English learning when L1 was overused.

Lin's study, similarly to Cai and Fang, explores the cognitions and teaching practices of three tenth-grade English teachers in a private high school in Taipei via observations and interviews. Her participants all used L1 in class for the sense of security, scaffolding, and classroom management. Despite showing awareness of English varieties, they "clearly gave more weight to linguistic competence than communicative capability" (p. 12). Only one teacher mentioned his appreciation of global Englishes in the new curriculum before being questioned on this topic, but his teaching practices revealed his adherence to standard pronunciation and possibly his underlying ideology. The teachers' desired and ideal teaching practices seemed to align with the traditional native-speakerism (Holliday, 2005) as they had little realization of the key tenets in global Englishes. A critical factor influencing Taiwanese high school English teachers' pedagogies and perspectives is the presence of the college entrance exam, which to a great extent perpetuates standard language ideology and NS norms.

The findings of the two studies indicate the persistence of the monolingual EFL paradigm among English teachers in Chinese-speaking contexts. The use of L1 was regarded as supportive and supplementary; therefore, it tended to be incidental, impromptu, and marginal. The teachers did not regard students' L1 as one of the *key* semiotic resources to draw on. They recognized its roles in building rapport and assisting explanation, but an immersion English-only class seemed to remain the ideal model for most participants in the two studies.

It may not be a coincidence that the teachers in both studies

showed a high degree of acceptance of the monolingual native-speakerism ideology. After being exposed to global Englishes ideas, many of them recognized the multilingual and translanguaging reality but in their teaching practices, the monolingual standards still prevail. This may be attributed to the powerful testing culture in the Chinese world. If standardized (monolingual) English tests based on NS norms continue to dominate English education, then global Englishes and translanguaging would remain marginal and unattainable. More research is necessary in terms of the evaluation of communicative competence and the educational potential of translanguaging assessment.

MIGRATING STUDENTS

In contrast to English teachers, students nowadays, especially those on the move, are more likely to perceive translanguaging and translanguaging practices as daily routines. The next two studies focus on mobile students who came to Taiwan from overseas. Chang's study investigates the experience of four international students studying in graduate school in Taiwan. They grew up in Vietnam, India, Jordan, and Indonesia and were not English native speakers. Qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews led to the emergence of three themes. The participants (1) used English as a social and academic lingua franca, (2) were adept multilingual users, and (3) developed intercultural awareness as they engaged in ELF practices. The participants did not have much experience using English with another nonnative (ELF situation) and had to gradually adapt to using "broken English" to communicate. While they adapted to English varieties in the local contexts, Taiwanese students' NS-based language ideology implicitly positioned these Asian international students as deficient English speakers, causing some miscommunication problems. Despite the challenging environment, they had to survive and thrive by flexibly utilizing linguistic and semiotic resources. Studying abroad in a non-English context nurtured the participants' intercultural awareness and strategic multilingual communication skills, which are extremely valuable in a contemporary globalized and digitalized world.

Lin and Wu's study on overseas Chinese students, or Qiaosheng, and their teachers also highlights the necessity to adjust monolingual instruction and bring in translanguaging pedagogies in order to serve the needs of students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Ethnographic observations were conducted in a 10th-grade English class in a high school for Qiaosheng. The teacher was interviewed

twice on her teaching beliefs, pedagogies, attitudes toward and experience with Qiaosheng in her 10-year career. Using language socialization and ideology as the analytical framework, Lin and Wu found that the teacher adapted her attitudes and ideologies toward Qiaosheng, from holding a monolingual standardizing perspective to recognizing students' diverse repertoires, leading to the adoption of a translanguaging pedagogy. Their study calls attention to the often-ignored fact that most Qiaosheng speak Chinese as L2 and their multilingual and multicultural repertoires may greatly facilitate teaching if teachers perceive them as useful resources and encourage students' language brokering and shuttling which embody translanguaging pedagogies. The teacher changed her approach as she interacted with the diverse student population and reflected on her practices. This suggests that if teachers are willing to take an open-minded stance to understand students' rich linguistic and cultural repertoires, English classes may become more accessible.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The last article in this special issue turns to Taiwan's latest policy of the *2030 Bilingual Nation*. Chang analyzed official documents to investigate the discourses underlying the imagination of a bilingual future by the government. Three ideologies, English supremacy, neoliberalism, and linguistic instrumentalism were identified as prevalent in the *Bilingual Nation* discourses. The ideology of English supremacy permeates the documents as shown in the frequencies of the word 英/英文 [English] (116 times) and 雙語 [bilingual] (86 times) as compared to those of 中/中文 [Mandarin] (seven times) and 母語 [native language] (five times). The other language in the *Bilingual Nation*, be it Mandarin or native language, receives little attention as if it is not important for new Taiwanese with a first language other than Mandarin to acquire competent proficiency in Mandarin or another local language in Taiwan. The rationale behind the policy to a great extent hinges on the assumption of English as a valuable linguistic tool that equips citizens with international competitiveness in the global market.

Chang further argues that three key issues regarding the policy need to be addressed. First, the policy does not specify the target level/types of English competence, presumably assuming NS standards as the goal, which ignores the truncated language use (Blommart, 2010) commonly occurring in contemporary ELF situations. Second, the assumption that competence in English would

lead to economic growth is taken for granted, which may not always be true as researchers from a critical perspective have shown different stories from mainstream discourses (e.g., Kubota, 2015). The last issue involves a perennial question of whether a second language user would be influenced by the socio-cultural values of the particular language accumulated over history, or can a language be learned and used as purely a tool? The issue is of great importance because of the hidden assumption of setting native English standards as the target. If English is conceived as one of the possible semiotic resources available, then the target English competence should not be native-like competence, which involves knowledge of Anglo-American cultures and norms. Chang raises these interconnected conflicts for policymakers to contemplate again in the subsequent policy revisions and implementations.

Students nowadays grow up in a diverse context, with the internet to access information from around the world. This affordance allows them to pursue whatever they are curious about. Nevertheless, over-emphasizing the economic and instrumental function of English in official policies could cause teachers to neglect students' internal motivation to grow and develop by acquiring new knowledge and skills of a second language and to acquire it as one of their own languages. Positioning English as a key semiotic resource serving specific purposes in particular contexts should be a more feasible approach for the *Bilingual Nation* policy. More attention and discussions on this reconceptualization and re-imagination of a bilingual future are necessary for all stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

This special issue intends to promote contemporary studies that help raise awareness for TESOL researchers, practitioners, and policymakers on the necessity to conceive of English(es) as (a) semiotic resource(s)/repertoire(s). The findings from the five studies included in this special issue suggest that the government policies and English teachers tended to be influenced by traditional NS-based ideology, while students with a diverse linguistic background were better able to utilize their linguistic repertoires in different languages to thrive in their learning environment. It is not surprising that younger generations are usually more open to new or progressive ideas while the older generations are inclined to be confined by their own assumptions accumulated from their experience and education. Meanwhile, academia has been known to produce progressive ideas

sometimes decades earlier than when they become applicable in mainstream society. Changes are happening, and I believe the awareness and knowledge of these ideas as contributed by the five studies in this special issue could help us better prepare for an unpredictable future.

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