

Shifting from the English-Only mindset in the EAP classroom: Does a plurilingual approach offer an alternative?

Bio

Steve Marshall is a Professor in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. His research focuses on plurilingualism and academic literacy, as well as international teacher education. In recent research, Steve has shown how students use languages other than the medium of instruction (English) effectively as tools for learning in Canadian higher education. Steve is also author of *Advance in Academic Writing 1 and 2*, and *Grammar for Academic Purposes 1 and 2*, published by ERPI ELT, Montreal.

Synopsis

In this presentation, I begin by defining plurilingualism as a phenomenon, a pedagogy, and as an analytic lens to employ in EAP classes. First, I illustrate how a plurilingual perspective challenges three traditional views of bi-/multilingualism which date back many decades (e.g., Bloomfield, 1933; Haugen, 1953; Weinreich, 1953): [i] bi-/multilingualism should involve native-like control of two or more languages – *not uneven competence in some languages*; [ii] a bi-/multilingual speaker should alternate between two or more separate languages – *not mixing languages*; and [iii] a bi-/multilingual speaker's utterances should be complete and meaningful – *not partial*. I suggest that these perspectives on language use are still prevalent today in the mindset of some educators in EAP and higher education settings, as is a “monolingual mindset,” which suggests that teaching should be in one language only, that is, English-Only in the EAP classroom. I will argue that a plurilingual lens can offer an alternative.

Next, I will briefly present what I see as the key characteristics of plurilingualism, referring first to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001), suggesting that plurilingualism finds itself within a tangled web of lingualisms (Marshall, 2021), which can be confusing for educators. I try to untangle this confusion about terminology by showing what plurilingualism has in common with terms such as multilingualism, translanguaging, and codeswitching – and what differentiates it.

I finish off by showing two data sets from various research projects on plurilingualism in Canadian higher education. The first shows how students successfully employ languages other than the medium of instruction (English) in and around their learning in EAP/academic literacy classes and in different disciplines – often challenging educators' assumptions. The second data set will focus on instructors and the challenges and dilemmas that they face when teaching in classes characterized by linguistic diversity and students communicating in multiple languages – languages which they may not understand.

Sources that I will refer to in the talk:

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