

## **Plurilingualism in the new era: A conversation with Enrica Piccardo**

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*(Received 22/12/17; final version received 16/7/18)* THIS IS AN UPDATED VERSION OF THE INTERVIEW ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN MAY 2018.

### **ABSTRACT**

The use of many languages has existed for many years; indigenous communities have used languages, dialects and variations of their languages to make meaning and to share culture. Plurilingualism as a theory and educational approach looks at people's language(s) repertoires and how they use them at any given moment to communicate. In this interview with Dr. Enrica Piccardo, we discussed the concepts of plurilingualism and multilingualism as well as the importance for education and the advancement of a more ecological and synergic paradigm shift in English teaching worldwide, and specifically in the Latin American context.

Keywords: Plurilingualism; pluriculturalism; multilingual education; Latinamerica; TESOL

### **RESUMEN**

El uso de muchos lenguajes ha estado en nuestros contextos por muchos años; las comunidades indígenas han usado sus dialectos y variaciones de sus lenguajes para hacerse entender y compartir su cultura. Plurilingüismo como teoría y enfoque educativo se orienta en el repertorio lingüístico que tienen las personas y como lo usan en un momento determinado para comunicarse. En esta entrevista con Enrica Piccardo, abordamos el tema del plurilingüismo y su diferencia con el multilingüismo, así como su importancia en la educación y el avance sinérgico y ecológico para un cambio en el paradigma de la enseñanza del inglés a nivel mundial, pero específicamente en américa latina.

Palabras clave: Plurilingualismo; pluriculturalismo; educación multilingüe; Latinoamérica; TESOL

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IN THIS INTERVIEW, Dr. Enrica Piccardo discusses the conceptualizations of plurilingualism and her work in the language research field. This interview was carried out during Spring 2017 by Ph.D. candidate Yecid Ortega. Dr. Piccardo describes what translanguaging and multilingualism are and what it means to be a plurilingual person, as well as the role of parents and teachers in teaching languages.

Professor Piccardo is a leading authority on multilingualism and plurilingualism and she has a vast experience in the field of language teaching education and research. Her main work is in Canada and France, the wider European context (through her collaboration with the Council of Europe), and the USA. She is currently leading two international projects on a quality approach to CEFR implementation and the internationally successful project LINCDIRE (LInguistic and Cultural DIversity Reinvented). Her most recent publication, with Brian North, is *Developing illustrative descriptors of aspects of mediation for the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR): A Council of Europe project* which reports on the 4-year Council of Europe project that produced the newly released CEFR Companion Volume (CEFR/CV) of which she is a co-author. The CEFR/CV includes new scales of descriptors for mediation and for plurilingual and pluricultural competence, among others, and presents a considerable innovation potential for language teaching and assessment.

The idea of a plurilingual individual is not new: certain indigenous communities in the Americas, Australia, Central Asia and Africa have always used different languages to communicate for the purposes of trade, self-determination, and cultural identity affirmation (see Hornberger, 2009; Henderson & Nash, 1997; Skutnabb-kangas, 2012; United Nations, 2012/2016; Walsh & Yallop, 1993). The term *plurilingualism* has to do with the individuals' flexible and composite linguistic repertoire and the use of languages, or even varieties of the same languages (Council of Europe, 2001). This concept is based on the assumption that languages are not separate entities that are compartmentalized in the brain, but rather form a dynamic multi-system (Wandruszka, 1979, as cited in Piccardo, 2013). For education, plurilingualism concerns valuing and acknowledging students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and goes in tandem with translanguaging as an approach that allows students to use their home language (or first language) to make meaning in a pedagogical task. These concepts cannot be separated, but are linguistic practices founded on social interaction and cooperation. In this interview, Dr. Piccardo expands on these ideas and I will provide some implications for English teaching in Latin America.

**Yecid Ortega:** What is the difference between multilingualism and plurilingualism?

**Enrica Piccardo:** The first thing I can say is that it may sound like it is just a terminological difference. Why should we pick yet another term; plurilingualism instead of multilingualism? At the end of the day, the English word was multilingualism, and plurilingualism is something that has been introduced from outside, from French or Latin

traditions. Also, one may think that multi- and pluri-, as prefixes, mean pretty much the same. But the reason why there is this distinction is precisely to stress a fundamental difference between a static view and a vision of language diversity.

Multilingualism, a term that has been around for a long time, just refers to multiple languages, like with the way people have always thought about bilingualism, but with more than two languages. There is no particular stress or attention given to the relationship between these languages. Thus, we must ask ourselves several questions, such as: Are these different languages in some relation? Are they interconnected? Are they interdependent? Is there a possibility that one acts upon the other, that one reinforces the other, that one hinders the development of the other? And what is this dynamic view of different languages?

Plurilingualism answers some of these questions as it portrays the idea that we can hardly consider language diversity and different languages as a series of pieces that are separate from each other, or as a series of elements that are independent from each other and that grow or fade in an independent way.

If we want to use a metaphor to describe plurilingualism, we can compare it to environments where you have many elements side by side. Take the forest, for example. You may think that every tree is independent, but the trees are in very strict connection to each other, and they grow together, and they are dependent on each other. And now we know that trees even communicate with each other. So, plurilingualism stresses this idea of not keeping languages separate. To continue the metaphor of the trees, they may be big powerful trees, or just little new ones, but they live together and are in some form of relationship, so we need to consider them together as a network. In the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR: Council of Europe, 2001, 2018), which is the document where the term plurilingualism was used for the first time in 1996 in the first provisional version, there was already the distinction made between multilingualism at a social level and plurilingualism at the individual level, stressing even then that within an individual it is almost impossible for languages to stay separated.

But it is not the end of the story because we must also add the lens through which we see the world. As Ingrid Gogolin (1997) reminded us, there is “the monolingual habitus”, which implies a monolingual lens that prevents us from seeing the rainbow - we just kind of see black and white - because we have grown up with this idea that languages are better separated in order to not contaminate each other. So if we continue with this static idea, people cannot be plurilingual; in the best case they can be multilingual. But if we use the term plurilingual, some positive things can happen. Not only, fortunately, can we acknowledge that people have more than one language, and really see the entire picture as an integrated linguistic repertoire, but also they can feel allowed, even encouraged to draw on them, to build upon all the wealth that they have, something that they usually don't do because they are not able to see those languages as interconnected or have been taught that such connections are not possible or are not good.

I would like to add one more thing that I have noticed; I have taught my course in multilingualism and plurilingualism twice now and on both occasions I have seen the same phenomenon: some students were with me on this idea already by day two - not day one, as this was a new concept for them – and saw themselves as plurilingual. For other students, it took a longer time, but by the end of the course, I can say that none of them saw themselves as monolingual anymore. And that has been a big satisfaction for me. Even those who thought they only knew English, for example. Well, they started to understand that, first of all, that is probably not true; they know some words of different languages, they know they have learned a language at school, maybe very badly, or they do not remember anything they have learned, but it is there and you can possibly reactivate it. But they also started to understand that there is not one English, but there are many *Englishes*. Because languages, all languages, and in particular international languages, have many varieties. But even other languages that are less international have many varieties. I am Italian and even Italian is very different if it is spoken in the north or in the south of the country, for instance. All over the world, the different socio-economic landscape makes for different language; people's age; the context, if you are in an academic or in a non-academic context; all those factors give rise to different varieties, sociolects and idiolects, different languages. Yes, you can call them in different ways, but basically, if we want to boil it down to something, they are, in a sense, part of this plurilingual landscape.

**YO:** I like the idea of your metaphor of the forest and the trees, because the way I see it, multilingualism looks at the trees as separate entities, or separate individuals, whereas plurilingualism is looking at the same trees, but also looking at what connects them; there are animals interacting, there are people, there is the wind and the changing of the seasons, leaves fall, sometimes flowers grow, all those things that interconnect; and the entire forest depends on the weather, the rain, the wind, the light and shade... . That is the beauty of plurilingualism as a concept: it acknowledges the interconnectedness of the languages, as opposed to multilingualism. Now, the next question is related because it seems we need to understand what the difference between plurilingualism and translanguaging is.

**EP:** I would like to follow up the idea of the forest. It also depends on the position of each tree. If it is peripheral it will grow in a certain way, if it grows in the centre it will be more connected and supported by the others. If the forest is cut down in one part, some of the trees that were in the centre may become peripheral. What is their reaction? Will they suffer? Will they grow more because they have more light? Who knows?

Now, to go back to this difference, only a few years ago there would not have been a need for this question because plurilingualism was basically starting to appear in the second half of the 90s. The first draft was in 1996, and during those years there were complimentary studies to the CEFR, and the second 1996 draft – as well as the 1998 version, which went

out online – already had the same definition as the one that was published in 2001 in the final version of the CEFR.

At that time, the use of *translanguaging* was only linked to experimentation in Wales around revitalizing the Welsh language. And that is the root of translanguaging: something that was done on purpose to allow the use of both languages to acknowledge and reinforce the one that was, in a sense, more at risk. That was basically like the foundation.

But since then and until very recently, those articles of scholars that worked a lot on translanguaging acknowledge this idea that plurilingualism is more of an umbrella term, more of a philosophical view, and that translanguaging is one of the most powerful tools to work towards that philosophy. It has only been in the last couple of years that the word translanguaging has been extended to cover everything that is connected to a plurilingual vision.

However, I just do not see the way translanguaging is used as having the same depth that I see in plurilingualism. There is not this idea of the philosophy of language interconnectedness that goes beyond the use of both languages, the alternating languages, code-switching and meshing, purposeful use of another language, or recognizing what is done in society by people who have more than one language.

With translanguaging, we do not see a stress on several languages in my opinion, although there can be. But above all, what I see in the studies is more about recognizing and valuing the language of students who come to an English-speaking area and are usually forced not to use their own mother tongue, be it Spanish or an Indian or Chinese or other language. So what I see more is the idea that students should be not only allowed but even encouraged to use translanguaging in their path in order for them to use the tools that they have available, and so be more effective.

Now, this is certainly a very good thing, and I am certainly very supportive of that. What I am not supportive of is to stretch this view - which is a way of doing things, a teaching practice, a strategy for learners, a strategy for teaching, the recognition of a social phenomenon - into a broader view that recognizes, as we said before, this general, broad, interconnected view of language-knowing, language-learning, language-proficiency, in whatever constellation you may have in your life, be it your mother tongue plus a second language, plus another foreign language, plus an interest that you have, including modern languages and classical languages (for example, Latin and Ancient Greek or Sanskrit). I had one student in the group who was very interested in the Sumerian alphabet, for example. Well, that is all part of a plurilingual vision, it is not part of translanguaging. If you adopt a plurilingual perspective, you can easily find a place for all these phenomena that are very important, because any language, even if it is considered a ‘dead’ language, can be foundational for other languages, or for your process of cognitive development.

**YO:** Yes, so if, on top of your language - or languages - you have a knowledge of Latin or

Greek, or a couple of indigenous languages, for example, or if you are interested in Sumerian writing and try and learn it, all of those languages become a repertoire that you possess, that you have, independently of whether you translanguage or not, or of how often you translanguage. Plurilingualism helps in recognizing this repertoire, and eventually strengthening it, whilst translanguaging is more focused on classroom pedagogy.

**EP:** Yeah, translanguaging is more applied. As I said, there is nothing wrong with the concept of translanguaging, quite the contrary. I am very happy that it is out there. What I would like to see is to not extend this concept beyond its possible limits, but to try to deepen it, in a sense, to strengthen it within its function – instead of fighting a territorial battle by putting one concept against the other, why not try to see the interconnectedness of these two, and how they could reinforce each other?

**YO:** Now, I am going to read a quote from one of your articles in *TESOL Quarterly* and then after that, I will ask you a question about it. So, in that article you say “plurilingualism promotes awareness of language diversity, functional uses of a variety of linguistic means, recognition of similarities and differences among languages, and the link between language and culture(s) and eventually also of the specific features of each language, including the mother tongue” (Piccardo, 2013, p. 609). When we think about the link between plurilingualism, which is the theory, or a philosophical mindset, and plurilingual education in formal settings, how would you define and describe what we may call a pedagogy of plurilingualism?

**EP:** That is a very important point. One of the doubts people have is that they say: ‘*Okay, I am fine with the philosophy and the theory behind everything, but how can we make that possible in everyday practice? How can we implement this idea?*’ Well, let’s consider some keywords in this quote: one is *awareness*; another is this idea of *functional uses* and *variety* of means; then *similarities and differences*; and the final one is *mother tongue*. So, let’s go through them one by one.

*Awareness* is really the keyword. *Plurilingualism* is not the same as *polyglottism*. I mean plurilingualism does not mean that you are phenomenal in several languages, it means that you have this awareness, this capacity to draw on different resources, and also freedom to do that, not just the ability, but this confidence and risk-taking attitude of using whatever elements you have, without being confined by being restricted to purity. It is a two-way phenomenon, because in a sense you are aware of language diversity, so you say ‘*Okay, I can use another word, I can draw on that, this word is better at expressing this concept, or this grammatical form in that language is much clearer to me, it gives me a better idea of what it is intending to codify and express than the corresponding in another language.*’

But it also works the other way round. By exploring ways of conceptualizing through

different languages you become more aware of the phenomena involved, the linguistic phenomena, and also the cultural – that is a bit of a different story - but culture in the sense how the language conveys the culture. That is why I wrote *including the mother tongue* because, in a sense, you do not look at your own mother tongue in the same way as before; once you enter this plurilingual vision, you start seeing your mother tongue in a different way. Marcel Proust used to say that the end of a long journey is not seeing new places, but seeing the same places with new eyes. And that applies perfectly to plurilingualism. It is like after you have gone on a journey through different languages and cultures, you may know more about different languages and cultures. But one thing is for sure; you will never see your own language and culture in the same way as before. You will have acquired an awareness, and a capacity to compare your culture(s) to other cultures and to appreciate your mother tongue more than you did before, because it is no longer just something you learned automatically when you were a child.

And the other two words are linked to this, you see; similarities and differences among languages. The moment you know you are aware is when you say: *‘Oh yes, in English you say this but in Spanish it is different and in Italian it is different’* and you ask, why are they different? What is the culture behind this? Why are they expressed in different ways, and is this linked to the way we organize time, the way we organize relationships or food, the literature and poetry in the language? Every possible element. And I referred to the functional use too; using words the way you need them and being free to use them.

Now, to go back to the beginning of your question, how can we do that in class? Well, precisely by stimulating and creating this curiosity among the kids (and when I say, kids, I mean from little kids to students all the way up to university). Young learners, teenagers, adults, everybody has this natural curiosity for the linguistic phenomenon. Teachers are able to open their eyes and to stimulate them – teachers, other adults or other friends, but the teacher is the one who creates the right atmosphere in the classroom for students to learn from each other, because they do not just learn from the teacher, or maybe they even learn more from their peers than from their teacher. But the teacher is necessary to create this space where they can first of all visit curiosity and this fear of taking risks, saying: *‘Okay, you do not know the word in this language, try another one, try and invent, try and think of what it could be in that language, considering the different elements that you have and that you know, it may be wrong, but it is a risk, it is a hypothesis, but you go for that.’*

And lastly, this idea of the roots of a language: etymology. It is a word that sounds very academic, and teachers may say: *‘Oh, but I am dealing with eight-year-old kids, how can I possibly work with that?’* Well, you can, of course, you may need to simplify the name, but still, it is extremely interesting for kids. And some teachers may say: *‘Okay, but I am teaching English and most of my kids are Chinese, so, where is the link?’* Well, in that case, maybe you have to compare rather than to find similarities, you may work a lot on syntax and on the construction of the sentence, its grammatical elements, the sounds, more than on

the vocabulary because the vocabulary is very, very different. In any case we will end up thinking that languages are less different than what we think they are. Another element that plurilingualism stresses is the use of international words that are very similar, although they are sometimes spelt in a different way in different languages.

When I was teaching in France, I had a student from Poland doing her Masters in France, and she was doing very interesting work on showing how much French was in the Polish language. One would never think that French was so pervasive in Polish. Yes, historically there was contact, and although it may be pronounced in a different way, and the sound is different when the teacher takes you through that, you see a lot of similarities beyond differences, something that I would have never ever imagined existed.

Another possibility is – even though this may sound odd – to extend to other similar languages. You were mentioning indigenous languages before. Although they are very different from each other, they have situated themselves along continua, so it is very interesting for the teachers to show that this is an indigenous language and that the next one on that continuum would have that way of saying this, which is slightly different.

But other languages situate themselves along continua too, or families of languages, so, you can work a lot on that, so you see you can work on etymologies, on structure, on many different elements... .

I have said in the past that you can make a monolingual class become very plurilingual. Well, you can teach English in a very plurilingual way, for instance, the moment you show the differences in vocabulary between British English, American English, Australian English, and South African English. For Spanish it is the same, you can say different words from different Spanish-speaking countries; in Spain, they say this, in Argentina they say that, and so on.

**YO:** Yes, that is true. While teaching the fruits in English to children, teachers can say that Argentinians say “frutilla” for strawberry and Colombians say “fresa”.

**EP:** Yes, and that stimulates curiosity. Because one point is to try and take kids away from this idea that there is a right or wrong way to say things. It is the idea that we have that English has to be the “Oxbridge”, in Europe at least this is still the ideal. And for French, it’s the same story: there is still this ideal, the purest French is considered to be spoken in Loire valley, and then if you have a teacher who is from Congo, or Quebec their French is not considered sufficiently standard, and there are some “*Oh no*” reactions.

Another interesting episode happened when I was teaching in France. I had a student who did her Master’s thesis on experimental education with kids learning Spanish, and she was working on the cultural aspect. Incidentally, for those kids, the only Spanish-speaking country that existed was Mexico, for some reason. Perhaps it had something to do with football teams. But this is not the point, the point is that when she presented some recording

of Spanish-speaking kids to her students, and they had to try and figure out what they were saying, one kid said ‘*pourquoi ne peuvent-ils pas parler comme nous?*’, (‘*Why cannot they speak normally like us?*’) referring to French. Her students were in fact very monolingually oriented, something that prevented them from embracing difference. So, this idea of plurilingualism is meant to really take people away from the idea that there is one language, one variety, and one possibility.

**YO:** What do you think would be the role of parents in this plurilingual pedagogy?

**EP:** Oh, it is enormous. It is really, really big. I actually think that parents can play a huge positive role or a huge negative role. And that is crucial. Because if they themselves are not buying into this, they continue to pass the message onto the kids that you should not mix languages, you should have the best French, the best English or Spanish.... Here, for example, parents say ‘*But what kind of French are you teaching? The good one? From France? Not the one from Quebec?*’ Although we are in Canada, and it would be so important for the kids to have both types of French. So, yes, parents can play a huge role the moment they themselves are liberated from this monolingual *habitus*.

**YO:** What you have explained today works very well in multilingual areas and contexts such as in North America or Europe. But in Latin America, specifically in Argentina, people may believe these contexts are monolingual and that we are, linguistically, less diverse. So, how can we have plurilingual education in such contexts where we believe that we are not necessarily as diverse linguistically?

**EP:** I think that you have given the answer there; ‘we believe that we are not...’. I think that is the point. How much is reality and how much is belief? In a sense, I’ve never seen such a monolingual reality as Canada and North America and at the same time, apart from maybe in Europe, in big cities in Europe, I have never seen such a multilingual reality as Toronto before coming. But, do they believe they are plurilingual? Let me give you a practical example: here, it is really a multilingual city and at school, everybody has at least two languages. Most of the kids have at least a third language at home, if not two more, so it is very common for kids here to have four languages. But those kids, because the province considers itself monolingual, they kind of hide or talk down their roots in their other languages. They think they cannot speak French, they see themselves as English speakers only. So, the point of plurilingualism is really to make this diversity visible.

Now, unfortunately, I have never been to Argentina, I wish that one day I could go, but I know, for example, again, being Italian, that there are a lot of families with Italian origin in Argentina. So, how visible is this heritage? And Argentina is close to Brazil, another big language. To what extent do people realize that Spanish and Portuguese are very close and

that you can easily introduce some elements of Portuguese. I am sure that everybody's studying English because it is the language that is most widespread. So, you see, you may easily have kids that, due to their family ties, have one heritage language, even if they do not speak it anymore because it was the language of their grandparents, but it is the kind of leverage for curiosity for another language. They have Spanish, and as we said they have one variety of Spanish, but the teacher can easily bring words in from other Spanish-speaking countries or varieties. And they have another big language as a neighbouring language; Brazilian Portuguese. So, plurilingualism is already there, it is just that it may be below the ground. It is a question of nurturing it and making it grow, and germinate, and making it visible.

**YO:** We have never realized that, like you say in your paper we mentioned today, that we are all plurilingual because we have not understood that languages are variations of the languages that we speak. If you live in one specific area in Buenos Aires or if you live in Córdoba or if you live in another region you may have different variations of the same Spanish and you can bring that it into the English class.

**EP:** And I forgot about the indigenous languages. Argentina has a lot of indigenous communities, so again, they might learn just a couple of words, but that is one of the languages of the country too. Nowadays, where we are at last trying to get out of this colonial mentality that was neglecting and suffocating the very existence of other languages, especially indigenous ones, now is the moment for true plurilingualists to raise that curiosity. You may have kids who have indigenous languages, again in their family roots and not confined to certain reserves. Because the problem of indigenous languages even here is that there are reserves or areas where they are spoken - and spoken just there - and that, again, is a multilingual vision, you know, which is terrible at the end of the day. Because it is as if each one had its own corner. *'Provided you don't disturb me, I won't disturb you. I am not interested in what you do. I do not want to mingle. I stay here, you stay there, you have your separate language, and I respect you.'* Now, that is not good. We know that that will not get us anywhere. We have seen already that it is more negative than positive.

**YO:** Do you think that in Europe, North America and Latin America, teacher education programmes are prepared for plurilingual education?

**EP:** Unfortunately, the only country I have been to in South America was one short visit to Brazil. The furthest down I have seen so far is Mexico, which is not yet South America even or the Caribbean, where there are other varieties of Spanish like in Cuba and in the Dominican Republic. But, I have never been to the South American context. So, I cannot comment on the teacher education there specifically. But I have been around a lot in Canada,

a little bit in the States, and a lot in different countries in Europe: France, England, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Austria, Spain, so really quite a lot. And I have seen how they organize their teacher education and how it is organized here. And, well, it is still a struggle for most. Things are moving; in certain areas, things are moving, and that is very good. But the curricula themselves are still not oriented towards plurilingualism. They are still keeping languages separate because there are different instructors for the different languages and these instructors themselves very often have not been trained towards plurilingualism, so they are not passing it on to their students. The curricula are still created in a separate way from one language to the other. Languages are kept separate in the curriculum because there is summative assessment at the end, and assessment is almost always monolingual. But as I said, things are moving, and I have seen some good signs. I have in mind two examples of high-stakes plurilingual exams: one in Austria, which is the *Matura* at the end of secondary school - and it has started to become plurilingual in the sense that you have to draw upon one language and express yourself in another, you have documents in different languages including your own mother tongue on which you can build to express yourself. Then in Greece, there is another high-stakes exam with the same idea, you are given different documents in one language and you have to recreate the meaning in the target language. It's a small step. You could say we're still in a multilingual paradigm and not in a plurilingual one, and that's probably true, but if I go backwards from there - if I put myself in those teachers' or professors' shoes, how can you possibly train these students for such an exam without having them perceive the differences and similarities between the different languages and being more at ease with teaching from one language to another? So it could have a kind of positive backwash effect.

Other things that seem to be going in the same direction are reflective tools for teachers to understand their own linguistic repertoire, as you said before, like, there is the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters*. Okay, this is more the cultural part, but, there are portfolios for teachers to make them more aware of their linguistic repertoires and to build on that, and to push the teachers towards new languages. There are tools that have been developed to help the teachers put together work with different languages. For example, projects like *Miriadi*, a project that tries to help teachers work with Romance languages, neo-Latin languages, where they use plurilingual books. It's true that they have not always been trained for that, but sometimes they are.

In the new *Companion Volume to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, there are new scales for plurilingual and pluricultural dimension education. As the CEFR has pushed, has fostered renewal in different aspects of language education including teacher education, we can expect that these new scales will also have an impact on that, where they are used. Again, in Europe, there is a project now that is trying to study the feasibility and the need for a framework for teacher education (temporarily called the CEFR for teachers), where it's a kind of a list, a catalogue and also a framework for what language

teachers should be able to do, what kind of dimensions they should care about, etc. And one aspect is plurilingualism.

So, there are a lot of good signs that things are moving in that direction. It's true that a lot still needs to be done, but we can be optimistic that one day we will get there.

**YO:** Good to know.

We are aware that you have been working on the CEFR for a number of years. This framework has also been adopted in language policies outside the European Union. In Latin America, the CEFR has been adopted for a while now, so in an era of culture and context responses to pedagogy, do you believe that such frameworks are still valid in educational contexts in Latin America?

**EP:** Well, first of all, just a small correction, it's not the tool of the European Union, it's from the Council of Europe – they're very, very different. The Council of Europe is a much broader institution and it's not political in terms of its governing body, as it deals with human rights and the rule of law and one of the mandates is to deal with intercultural matters.

Brian North was one of the authors of the first version of the CEFR and also the coordinator of the 4-year Council of Europe project to produce the new extended set of descriptors, and I am in the core group of authors. The CEFR Companion Volume which contains these new descriptors will be another big leap forward.

So, yes, of course, the CEFR has been adopted in very different places including Japan; countries that are very, very different. So, that's not a problem because it's the nature of the CEFR to be sufficiently neutral to be adapted, to be useful in different contexts. This *E* from the Commonly *European* Framework of Reference is there because it's a product of the Council of Europe, it was created in that context, that's all. Besides, their motto 'united in diversity' carries a strong idea of intercultural education too.

The CEFR is not a sacred book that you have to hammer down to a class, it's adaptable, it is something that you take and you read, you understand its philosophy, and you use it purposefully for your context. There are adaptations for significantly different contexts, such as the Japanese context, which is very, very different, much more than the difference between South America and Europe. South America has much more in common with Europe than Japan, so I do not think it will need as many adaptations as with the Japanese context. The Japanese have developed a lot of descriptors for the lower levels because they needed to chunk down their students' progress, so they developed what they call the CEFR-J, and it is a good document.

**YO:** Okay, so my final question is... We have been talking about the inclusion and valuing of indigenous and modern languages in the English-language classrooms in Latin America,

specifically in Argentina, to challenge the hegemonic practices of English-only policies. In North America they have the idea of ‘English only’, and sometimes the children’s home languages are not recognized. What is your opinion on this? What should things look like in Latin America where Spanish is the main language of the classroom? Should the teacher avoid English only and allow the students to use Spanish to convey meaning?

**EP:** English-only policies, as you can imagine, are something that I am really scared about, being a scholar who is interested in plurilingualism. I think it will cause a lot of damage, not only for indigenous languages, of course for indigenous languages more than anything else because they are only spoken there, but also for any other languages. So, I really think that plurilingualism should be the key to first of all help indigenous languages to be recognized more, to be known, and be valued. A way to challenge English-only ideologies is to recognize other languages, heritage languages, international languages, any other additional language. Recently I have heard somebody use the word *world* languages because they do not want to call them *international* or *additional*, but just more generally world languages, which I like. And so, I think, I hope, that plurilingualism will help challenge this aspect. Together with my team we have this project, *LICDIRE* (LINGuistic & Cultural Diversity REinvented) where we precisely try to bring together Western and indigenous languages to benefit both, and one aspect that we have not mentioned so far is the pedagogical part, where we try to bring together this idea of a plurilingual view with a CEFR-based Action-oriented Approach.

So, I think that with Spanish, it is in a sense a bit the same thing, Spanish being a strong, international language spoken in many countries; Spanish is definitely a more invasive language, let’s say, not giving so much space to others. But at the same time, if we look at history, I am pretty optimistic. The thing with North America and South America, I am generalizing a bit here, is that there are still huge differences in the recognition and space that have been given to indigenous cultures and languages. I mean the situation in South America seems to me not as bad as in North America in terms of the indigenous languages. There are countries that have even started to officially recognize indigenous languages, and the communities are still stronger. Culturally, there has been much more cross-fertilization than in North America, you see that there has been a big influence of indigenous cultures on mainstream cultures. There has not been that big influence of indigenous culture on Anglo-Saxon culture in North America – it is something very recent.

So one can imagine that there may be some good developments. This is somewhat my dream, my utopia, but I hope, and I do not think it is just a dream, that it could be a leading model. We could hope for this integration of indigenous languages to be even stronger in Central and South America than in the northern part of the continent. We can see the way things have changed in countries like New Zealand, where Maori culture is becoming stronger and one can hope that that will be the case elsewhere. So, I do not know if it is a

dream here, but I do not see the same problem. I see a similar problem but not as serious as with English. English has a more pervasive nature not only with indigenous languages but also with any other language in the world. And I do not see that happening in Spanish, at least not yet. So, we might have a good development there, possibly.

**YO:** Alright, I think that these were all the topics that we wanted to address today. Thank you very much for accepting this interview. Do you have anything to conclude?

**EP:** Yes, we talked a little bit about standardized testing. Standardized testing the way it is increasingly widespread today, is at odds with plurilingualism. Standardized tests are generally gatekeepers, and they still convey a model of the native speaker: strong, monolingual. So, they are something that we should deconstruct, we should change. More than anything else, I strongly believe, and not just for plurilingualism, that any innovation in language education has to start with assessment and testing, and then proceed backwards. Plurilingualism is not an exception in that respect. If we do not start to infuse a plurilingual element in these standardized tests, or in any tests, in high-stakes tests, then it is a kind of lost battle. We should not forget that.

**YO:** Could you comment a little bit on portfolio assessment approaches?

**EP:** Yes, for example, there is at least the possibility of accompanying a standardized test with a portfolio evaluation. Even if it was only 70% and 30%, that would make a huge difference. There are ways of going around it, we only need to be creative.

**YO:** I would like to thank Dr. Piccardo for her insights on this fascinating topic, above all as you enlightened us on the idea that we all are plurilingual. With this in mind, I would like to draw some implications and provide some thoughts on how Dr. Piccardo's idea could be home-engineered for the Latin-American context.

First of all, policymakers, administrators, curriculum designers, teachers, students and the communities need to raise this linguistic and cultural awareness that Professor Piccardo mentions. The first aspect I would like to mention here is how much power has been given to the English language, a climate of fostering an understanding that there are other world languages that are equally valid is important. This climate can be created by instilling a curiosity for languages while children are in the early years of education. A while ago, Mehisto, Marsh, and Frigols (2008) proposed a Language Showers approach to expose children up to 60 minutes per day to different languages. These Language Showers are not intended for children to learn the foreign language fully but rather to prepare students for a plurilingual and pluricultural society. Similarly, children in daycare or preschool can be exposed to Language Sprinkles (Ortega, 2017), a form of early language immersion for 10

minutes sometime during the school day. These language showers and sprinkles help children to be curious and to get acquainted with languages and cultures and to have a more positive attitude and familiarity with sounds and structures of languages.

Furthermore, there is a need to create an awareness that there are other variations of the Spanish language in Latin America and also within each country. Teachers could potentially compare and contrast these variations when teaching English. A good example of this is that in Colombia the word for a plastic or paper bag is called “talego”, “chuspa” or “bolsa” depending on the region. There are other Spanish words that come from indigenous languages and can easily be brought to the English language classroom. For example, the word “cuate” (friend) in Mexican Spanish comes from Náhuatl indigenous language “cuatl” that means “twin” and can mean in English “buddy”.

The second aspect I would like to bring is that unless policymakers welcome the teaching and learning of languages and the promotion of indigenous languages in language policies, there is little teachers can do to promote a plurilingual approach to English teaching. The CEFR is a reality for many countries in Latin America, but policymakers, academics, researchers and teachers need to go beyond considering only the levels, they need to start seeing the philosophy behind, the pedagogical dimension. Also, they need to feel free to adapt what is necessary so it is more cultural and linguistically relevant to their communities. What is important here is to remove language policies that are geared to “English-only policies” and instead “plurilingual policies for the teaching of languages” should be explored and promoted.

Finally, I would like to mention the teacher education aspect. Teacher education programs in Latin America can focus on language teaching with an emphasis on local/global cultures and languages. Courses on plurilingual and indigenous education may be beneficial for the pre-service teacher holistic training. Translanguaging approaches can be taught to teacher candidates in the language teaching methodology class. In other words, students in the English language classroom can use their linguistic repertoire (Spanish, variations of Spanish or indigenous languages) to make meaning during an English activity. Translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014) may include translation and code-switching practices in which students make sense by performing bilingually while carrying out a variety of reading, writing and speaking tasks. Action research initiatives can be also explored in which the teacher educators put emphasis on pedagogical strategies that are more in tune with their local realities and how these relate to global concerns. Curriculum and material designers can work together with teachers from other subject matters to create project-based and action-oriented activities (Piccardo, 2010) using portfolio assessments that challenge the current competitive and neoliberal goal-minded teaching and research perspectives. I believe that with this “new” plurilingual vision or worldview, researchers and educators can foster a more socially just world in which we all learn from each other, respect other cultures and languages and cohabit in a more liveable planet.

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### **Online Resources**

Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters:

[https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/default\\_en.asp](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/default_en.asp)

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Companion Volume with New Descriptors: to the <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989>

LINCDIRE: <http://www.lincdireproject.org/>

Miriadi Project: <https://www.miriadi.net/en>