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Multilingual assessment: Insights from psycholinguistic and educational research

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Several studies point to the paradox of monolingual assessment with multilingual individuals (De Angelis 2021): Assessing and evaluating multilingual individuals' linguistic and cognitive abilities using monolingual tests and norms does not do justice to the complexity of their language experience. Nor does it reflect their acquisition and learning processes, which involve the dynamic interaction of the languages in their repertoire (Herdina & Jessner 2002).

Psycholinguistic research on multilingualism has made progress in this respect since it relies less and less on monolingual norms as controls (McNamara 2012 and McNamara, Knoch & Fan 2019 for discussion). However, most of these studies involve testing multilingual individuals in different languages using a monolingual mode each time. Current research on assessment in education discusses the possibility of testing in a multilingual mode: The tests are designed in multiple languages (e.g., by means of translations) or multilinguals are allowed to answer using their full repertoire, for instance through code-mixing or answers in multiple languages (Lopez et al. 2017).

The design, administration and scoring of multilingual tests poses some challenges. However, recent studies have shown that the multilingual mode boosts multilinguals' performance in linguistic and cognitive tests, especially the ones tapping into their higher-order reasoning skills (e.g., metalinguistic awareness or inference-making; Jessner & Allgäuer-Hackl 2020).

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Metacognition in multilingual learning:
Multilingual awareness as a key factor

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Metacognition has been increasingly discussed as one of the main features of learning in the 21st century lately (see Haukas et al 2018). In the Dynamic Model of Multilingualism (DMM) (Herdina & Jessner 2002), which applies Complexity and Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) to multilingualism, it is argued that multilinguals develop increased knowledge of languages and language learning through experience. In this presentation a CDST perspective on multilingual learning with a focus on metacognition in the M(ultilingualism)-Factor will be presented (Jessner & Allgaeuer-Hackl 2022). The central sub-component of metacognition in DMM, in the form of multilingual awareness comprising metalinguistic and cross-linguistic awareness in multilingual learners (Jessner 2006), will be discussed as core feature of multilingual proficiency and its assessment.

In a number of studies multilingual awareness has turned out a core factor in both learning and teaching. These studies show that multilingual awareness has to be trained in multicompetence approaches to foster multilingual development (Jessner 2017). Consequently, multilingual awareness has to form part of multilingual assessment (see Hofer & Jessner 2019).

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Testing multilingual speakers in both mono- and multilingual mode: Some insights from psycholinguistic research

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Most studies on multilingual language processing are based on monolingual testing. However, multilinguals' language processing and understanding may be best conceptualized as the result of a dynamic interaction between all languages of their repertoire (e.g. [1] and [2]). In two studies, we tested multilingual speakers in two conditions, when the task involved one language only or when it involved more than one. We investigated the effects of the two conditions on multilinguals' language processing and understanding.

In Study 1 [3], 33 Greek-Italian bilinguals (8-11 years) rated the acceptability of grammatical and ungrammatical Italian sentences and were asked to explain what was wrong with the unacceptable ones. Sentences were presented in 3 conditions: (1) single grammatical/ungrammatical Italian sentences; (2) pairs of ungrammatical Italian sentences with their grammatical Italian counterpart; (3) grammatical/ungrammatical Italian sentences with ungrammatical/grammatical Greek translation. Children were better at noticing and explaining errors in condition 3, where their other language (Greek) was activated. We also assessed children's grammatical processing abilities in Italian through a sentence repetition task. Children with lower scores were found to benefit most from condition 3.

In Study 2, children played with Cheeky, a monkey who travelled and encountered problems at 8 locations. At each location, children found **Text A** with information about 3 super-fruits offering super powers. Children also got **Text B,** a story describing Cheeky's problem. They had to draw inter-textual inferences to decide which fruit Cheeky ate to solve the problem (e.g. a fruit that can make you jump high when you are in a hole). Text A and B were either presented in the same language (either Italian or German) or in different languages (Italian-German /German-Italian). In the two bilingual conditions, children were more likely to integrate information from Text A and Text B when they explained the inference.

Multilingual tests emerged as a more ecological way to assess multilinguals' language processing abilities, since they do not restrict multilinguals to one language. The comparison between the results of the two testing modes has allowed us to gain psycholinguistic insights into multilingual processing.

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What is the future of plurilingual language assessment in a large, so-called 'monolingual' language testing organisation?

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In the era of the 'multilingual turn' in language education (May, 2014), academic critics have been quick to point out the lack, or slow speed, of recognition or adoption of plurilingual, code-switching and/or translanguaging practices within language assessment (e.g. Shohamy, 2011). One particular source of vexation is how language tests, so historically entrenched in promoting proficiency in languages along monolingual lines, can ever make a truly plurilingual turn. In Europe especially, it has only been in the last few years that practitioners have been able to identify what a 'plurilingual assessment' might look like in practice.

Seed (2020) gives some examples and categorises four different types of plurilingual assessment. This paper aims to briefly explain this categorisation and then go into more depth regarding the first of these categories, „using one's plurilingual repertoire to prove skills in one named language" which has particular relevance to large so-called 'monolingual' English language testing organisations. We seek to address how the recognition of plurilingual repertoires and standard named languages can in fact co-exist (Kunnan & Saville, 2021). In order to address the question of whether and how test-takers already utilise their plurilingual repertoires, we report on how examples of code-switching are found even within what are supposed to be monolingual written test responses.

We evaluate what that might mean in practice before finally taking a more futuristic look at how the use of digital technology and AI provide the best chances of creating a truly personalised plurilingual assessment offer. In doing so, we review the nascent work already started (Nguyen, Yuan & Seed, 2022) and consider what the next steps might be in order to achieve more long-term aims.

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Assessing the multilingual competence and plurilingual individuals' skills and knowledge: similarities and divergences

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Assessment continues to reflect the traditional views of language separation and multilingualism is still considered as pluri-monolingualism (Dendrinos, 2020; Lopez, Turkan & Guzman-Ort; Stavans & Hoffmann, 2015). In educational institutions, languages remain separate from each other and assessment focuses on competences in each of them. Additionally, educational policy is usually framed as a challenge for multilingual assessment (Saville & Seed, 2022).

Since „multilingual assessment" often refers in academic publications, on one hand, to the assessment of multilingual competence and, on the other hand, to the assessment of non linguistic competences of multilingual persons, we will draw the distinction between both types of assessment but also highlight the multiple commonalities in the two evaluation processess (Melo-Pfeifer & Ollivier, in press).

We will focus on the definitions of "multilingual competence" and "multilingual individual" to lay the ground to:

i) the differentiation of principles, goals, and outcomes at stake in both in the assessment of multilingual competence and multilingual individuals' skills and knowledge;
ii) the different assessment procedures and instruments currently being proposed and implemented.

To clarify our therotetical presentation, the outcomes of two European projects will be presented: i) the Erasmus+ EVAL-IC project to exemplify how the multilingual competence can be assessed, ii) the METLA project from the European Center for Modern Languages to illustrate the assessment of multilingual students at school.

With this contribution, we want to feed the theoretical academic discussion on "multilingual assessment" and to open concrete pedagogical avenues as answers to the challenges posed by the assessment of multilingual competence and by the assessment of non-linguistic competences of multilingual individuals.

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Exploring possibilities and potentials for multilingual (ML) assessment in the Canadian educational context

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This paper reports findings from a research study conducted in Ontario, Canada exploring possibilities and generating empirical support for multilingual (ML) assessment in the Canadian educational context, to address unique teaching and learning needs of bi/multilingual learners from migrant backgrounds. Broadly, ML approaches to assessment align with current understandings of language as a multilingual construct, reflecting the creative, dynamic, and strategic language practices of bi/multilingual speakers and communities (Arias & Schissel 2021). Empirical support for ML assessment indicates positive effect and pedagogic washback, suggesting that for bi/multilingual students, the use of ML assessments contributes to better performance and more accurately reflects student knowledge (de Backer et al. 2017; Shohamy et al. 2022).

The study took place in two large urban school districts in Ontario, Canada. The first phase of the project, completed in 2020 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, gathered perceptual data through an online open-ended survey of 16 teachers about issues and challenges in assessing bi/multilingual learners. Based on insights from the survey data, the second phase of the project, completed during the 2021-2022 academic year, comprised fieldwork and collaborative inquiry conducted with three educator teams, including 22 elementary and secondary ESL and mathematics teachers and instructional leaders.

Data were generated from teacher interviews, focus groups, field-notes, artifacts of student work and digital images of assessment tasks. These data were analyzed thematically to construct meaningful patterns in how teachers engage linguistically adaptive bi/multilingual practices in the assessment context. Broadly, teachers developed ML assessments for both formative and summative assessment purposes. Engaging digital technology tools and incorporating both student- and teacher-initiated strategies, teachers made space for student choice and voice across processes and products of assessment, promoting translanguaging practices as both a scaffold and resource for learning.

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Defining Alternative Constructs of Multilingual Assessment in Higher Education: Assessment in Multilingual Contexts

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This paper is part of a larger project that provides practitioners within the field of heritage languages contexts in the Americas with examples of challenges faced by these academic communities in the design and implementation of effective assessment practices. The proposed presentation will provide a multidimensional perspective in which different communities of learners are represented.

The first part of the presentation seeks to depict and problematize current research in assessment methods and theories explored in Higher Education to assess language learners. These perspectives include different language learner profiles, multiple varieties of languages used in the classroom as well as different learning contexts in Higher Education. We will provide one example of challenges faced by two different contexts. The example examines how learner's judgments about their abilities to organize and perform given tasks influence their reported self-efficacies and ultimately inform curricular and assessment practices. Specifically, the project investigates the self-perceived capabilities of Spanish language students enrolled in second language (L2) and Heritage programs in two domains, speaking and writing, throughout a sequence of Beginning and Intermediate courses at a university in the U.S. Southwest. For the last part of the presentation, we will provide suggestions and recommendations for language assessment in multilingual contexts. We will include implications for teacher training in these types of contexts.

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Assessment with Bimodal-Plurilingual Learners – Trials and Errors

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Assessing the bimodal-plurilingual language profiles of immigrant d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing learners (IDML), and specifically their languages development, is a major challenge, as it involves considering the spoken, written, and/or sign languages of the host country in addition to learners' home language(s) (Cannon/Marx, submitted 2022). As well as language proficiency, assessments should consider the complexity of multilingual development by considering aspects affecting development such as age of acquisition, opportunities for language use, competencies in further languages, and language varieties, and for refugee learners, experiences of limited or interrupted education and trauma. This complexity results in challenges for language assessment, which is aggravated by the fact that most standardized instruments for spoken and written language are not normed for either d/DHH or for plurilingual learners, and there is a lack of appropriate instruments for sign languages in general (Pizzo & Chilvers, 2016). Subsequently, the validity of language assessments presently used for IDML is questionable. This is a major issue both for research and for pedagogy.

In order to address this issue in the German context, a comparison of different available assessment instruments is being carried out. The aim of the reported study is (1) to examine available spoken, written and sign language assessments, (2) to consider their usefulness for IDML, and (3) to pilot them with the target population of IDML, in order to (4) provide recommendations for researchers about alternative ways to approach assessment. In various trials beginning in June 2022, IDML at secondary-school level are being assessed with instruments developed for German and German sign language (DGS) contexts to determine inter-test validity. To assess written and spoken language, three different assessment instruments were chosen and subsequently piloted, while to assess DGS, two assessments will be used. Finally, a comparison of skills in different spoken, signed and written languages is to be carried out using the SOLOM and the CEFR guidelines. The results of the ongoing assessment study shed light on the potential for existing instruments to provide necessary and useful information for research and teaching practice.

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Multiple dimensions of multilingual tests:
Theory, education and justice

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This paper digs deeper into the multiple facets of multilingual assessments from a number of perspectives in relation to two varied language minority groups in schools. Theoretically, it examines the construct of academic/multilingual cognitive processing; educationally, demonstrating how multilingual tests enhances learning and school achievements, and justice and fairness by incorporating the full language repertoires. The paper reports on sets of empirical results along these perspectives and will encourage educational systems to use of multilingual tests for language minority students for academic achievements, enhancing group identity and addressing social justice.

Assessing general comprehension abilities of newly arrived multilingual students

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When testing linguistic and subject-specific skills in linguistically and culturally diverse contexts, one challenge is to avoid bias. Especially in the assessment of linguistic skills the instruments' construct validity plays a crucial role, since Method Bias (van de Vijver & Tanzer 2004) can influence the validity of results. This is likely if communicative skills are to be measured, which are to be seen as independent of skills in named languages from a theoretical perspective. As a consequence, multilingual students' skills are potentially underestimated. Otheguy, García & Reid (2015) point out in this context that in assessment skills 'in language' and skills 'in a language' must be distinguished. Hence, if the focus is on general linguistic abilities, learners should be able to exploit their entire linguistic repertoire to make meaning and respond to test items.

Against this background, we are currently working on an online-based diagnostic tool in which learners' general comprehension ability is operationalized as a cross-linguistic construct. Learners can employ linguistic means from the named languages Ukrainian, Russian, German, and English when listening to and reading texts and switching fluidly between the languages. Following listening and/or reading, the learners perform tasks that are to a major part based on the German national competence models for reading and listening comprehension. The students listen as well as read the questions and answer in all the languages mentioned above.

Our work aims to contribute to assess multilingual students' potentials unbiasedly and to enable teachers to distinguish between skills 'in language' and 'in a language'. In this paper, we present the current state of development (as work in progress) by showing a prototype and we discuss both didactic and research-related potentials.

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