

BOOK REVIEW

Visualising Language Students and Teachers as Multilinguals: Advancing Social Justice in Education, by P. Kalaja and S. Melo-Pfeifer. Multilingual Matters, 2025, 328 pp., USD 49.95 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-80041-650-5

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The edited book *Visualising Language Students and Teachers as Multilinguals: Advancing Social Justice in Education* offers thirteen individual chapters, an introduction and conclusion by the editors, a foreword on visual methods for researching language students and teachers as multilinguals, and contributions to social justice in education. The book is divided into three parts thematized according to time: Part 1) the (past) histories of individual multilinguals; Part 2) the (present) beliefs, attitudes, and values among multilinguals; and Part 3) (future) visions in the context of (student) teachers' professional developments. The book is based on visualizations as an arts-based research approach and aims to advance social justice by supporting multiple forms of individual multilingualism within language education contexts.

The foreword, written by Barkhuizen and titled “Multistoried Visualisations and Narrative Holes”, outlines the relevance of drawing on visuals (photographs) to understand a part of a person's life story and the people connected to it, while the introduction provides a definition of the key terms and an overview of the book. Both texts emphasize that multilingualism is complex and requires innovative, arts-based methods to understand its lived and educational dimensions, whereas the introduction offers a conceptual framework.

The introduction, entitled “Being Multilingual and Living Multilingually – Advancing a Social Justice Agenda in Applied Language Studies”, follows the multilingual and visual

turns in language pedagogies, highlighting multilingualism as lived, embodied, and multisensory. Social justice is framed as a means to empower multilingual individuals and communities by reclaiming their stories and fostering inclusive, equitable dialogues in society. Social justice is not only directed at multilinguals, but everyone in society, aiming to create critical dialogues, ensure inclusion, and promote equity. Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer (2019) argue that researching multilingualism demands arts-based and multi-semiotic methods beyond logocentric perspectives. The authors emphasize linguistically and culturally responsive teaching and advocate for visual methods to enhance inclusion, participant agency, and deeper insights into multilingual experiences, highlighting the value of innovative methodologies in language teacher education. The introduction also outlines the book's tripartite structure and chapter summaries.

Part one starts with a chapter by Mård-Miettinen and Björklund titled “‘From YouTube, I Watch Videos and Vlogs and Other Stuff in Different Languages’: Immersion Students as Users of Multiple Languages”. The research takes place in Swedish immersion schools in Finland and aims to investigate to what extent school languages become part of the students' everyday lives. 17 students in grade five and grade eight from two different locations with diverse linguistic repertoires participated in the study, involved in taking photos of multilingual affordances in their everyday environments. 164 photographs were collected and discussed in interviews before being analyzed using thematic analysis and multimodal content analysis. The findings show that the students deconstructed monolingual myths, showed willingness to use several languages, and developed agency to use a language and resist being imposed on a language (practice) .

In the second chapter, titled “Just ‘Native’ Assistants? Exploring the Plurilingual Potential of Assistant Language Teachers in Japan through Visual Polyethnography”, Pearce, Oyama, and Moore explore multilingualism and native speakerism with two Anglophone assistant language teachers (ALT) in Japan. After examining the ALT system on a theoretical basis, they present their methodology, which consists of polyethnographic discussions and multimodal content analyses. The participants drew and then discussed their linguistic biographies. They also present and discuss a project on multilingualism in their schools. While joint polyethnographic discussions with the researchers can empower the participants, awareness at an individual and institutional level about multilingualism and the creation of collaborative networks can foster social justice among ALT.

The third chapter by Melo-Pfeifer, “Visual Methods in Language Teacher Education: Uncovering Beliefs about Career Choices Held by Pre-Service Teachers”, deals with French language student teachers’ beliefs about their professional pathways and career choices in Germany, expressed through visual methods. The author highlights educational and other systemic inequalities impacting access to becoming a language teacher. To reconstruct the French language student teachers’ beliefs on their career choice and professional pathways, 20 drawings and associated comments were analyzed from three different (often overlapping) perspectives: becoming 1) a teacher; 2) a teacher of a modern language; and 3) a French teacher. The findings relate to the intersection between personhood, profession, language, and context, impacting career choices and pathways. Regarding the impact, specific personal phases in life are identified as well as, transversally, mobility and/or study abroad and becoming multilingual.

Chapter four is titled “English Remote Teaching in Drawings: Stories of Teacher Resilience in Brazilian State Schools” and authored by de Laurentiis Brandão. The author investigates English teachers’ experiences with remote teaching during the pandemic in Brazil, focusing on the challenges encountered, their responses to them, and how these experiences shaped them as professionals. To do so, the author instructed two teachers to depict and describe their experiences, using narrative inquiry. Using a thematic and narrative analysis designed for the study, the author presents a holistic view of the teachers’ experiences of becoming resilient and adapting to remote teaching. While huge workloads and poor technologies presented a challenge, teachers responded to them with agency and self-efficacy. The author concludes that different access to technology and English language classrooms is a pressing social justice issue in Brazil.

Part two of the book starts with a contribution by Niemelä titled “Language Ideologies in Primary School Pupils’ Drawings of the Finnish Language”. Drawing on language ideologies in education and society on Finnish in Finland, the author used primary and secondary students’ drawings of the representation of the Finnish language to explore what discourses and ideologies are constructed or materialized. While most of the participants were born in Finland, one cohort consisted of several students with a migration background that were asked for their linguistic repertoire and a drawing of the Finnish language. While the students born in Finland identified as Finnish, those with a migration background identified more with their hometown or neighborhood. Using a multimodal and critical discourse analysis, the following aspects are identified: discourse on the national level; difficulty and everyday

Finnish on the multilingual level. The ideologies reflect the identity constructions in Finns as a unified group with an exclusive language, and in Finnish students with a migrant background drawing on multilingualism.

The sixth chapter is titled “Using Data Visualisations in a Participatory Approach to Multilingualism: ‘I Feel What You Don’t Feel’” and authored by Storto. This study investigates participants’ reactions to visualized data they helped generate. The data relates to multilingualism in the language classroom, from a questionnaire study with 593 students from different secondary schools in Norway. The questionnaire results were visualized and discussed with 114 of those students (in groups) to enhance their impact on the study, integrate them ethically and responsibly into the data analysis, and provide opportunities for their critical reflection through active participation. The visual-haptic intervention with the data not only stimulated students’ subjective ideas about multilingualism, but also different readings of the questionnaire data. The use of these interactive data visualizations helped students to make multilingual experiences tangible and emotionally resonant so that they could co-construct meaning, foster emotional engagement, and share understanding.

Chapter seven by Tavares, “Seeing the Unseen: Representations of Being and Feeling in Plurilingual International Students’ Adjustment Experiences”, explores the structural challenges international students face in Canadian study-abroad programs. Using ethnography-oriented portraiture, the experiences of sociocultural adjustment of three international students are analyzed. The author asks how (participatory) photography can support representing their experiences and feelings. As explained in interviews, the participants learned English as an additional language and thus not only adapted to the culture of the university abroad but also the language. Thematic and semiotic analysis reveals that their adaptation was not directly tied to language proficiency. While two participants experienced solitude and distance from the host students, one student actively built international networks. The drawings enabled students to express complex emotional dimensions of their multilingual adjustment that would likely remain unspoken in verbal-only methods.

In chapter eight, titled “Interpreting Multilingual Spaces through a Lens: Linguistic Landscape Projects for Cultivating Intercultural Competence”, Ahn researches the ideologies that students from South Korea identify in the Linguistic Landscapes (LL) of their environment. Her project, part of a course for eight science students, aims to develop their critical language and cultural awareness, and assess how their work contributes to their

understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity in their surroundings. Following an instruction on LL about its definition, analysis, and relationship with linguistic and cultural ideologies, the students collected photos or videos of selected LL, then analyzed and interpreted them in reports submitted to the author. Ahn encouraged students to photograph the LL to critically examine linguistic power structures and reflect on their own intercultural competence. The thematic analysis of these reports shows students' growing awareness of their neighborhood. This awareness is indicated in nuanced observations, reflections on sociopolitical forces for selecting languages in the LL, and discussions of unequal language representation and access. The task allowed participants to see their environment through a critical, social justice-oriented lens.

Chapter nine is authored by Pinho and Gonçalves and titled "Language Teachers' Professional Identity in Visual Narratives: Depicting Pedagogy for Linguistic and Cultural Diversity through a Social Justice Lens". They present teachers' social justice and activism perspectives in the language classroom, focusing on English primary school student teachers in Portugal (group 1) and Portuguese as a heritage language in-service teachers for adults (group 2). They collected 39 drawings from group 1 and 64 drawings from group 2 depicting a metaphor of themselves as a teacher. The study compares participants' representations of the languages taught and analyzes their professional identity-building processes regarding cultural and linguistic diversity. The findings show differences between the two groups in frequency and quality of depicting multilingualism and interculturality; while group 1 focused on students' migration and culturally diverse backgrounds as an asset, group 2 emphasized their teacher role as mediator of the national culture taught. All metaphors drew on the participants' lived experiences.

Chapter ten, authored by Prada, is titled "Visualizing Translanguaging Awareness in Language Teacher Education: A Case Study". Approaching an area of practice of critical pedagogies, translanguaging, and language-arts approaches, the study centers around a final visual project of an international workshop. The single participant of the case study is a female PhD student in language education, and the focus is on her shifting perspectives on language throughout the workshop. Data collection included notes, descriptions, and the student's final art project. The findings relate to the participant's engagement with translanguaging and personhood, the interconnection of the group in the workshop, and the acknowledgement of (noncolonial) identities. The findings show the participants' critical consciousness in the form of a dynamic and sociopolitical understanding of multilingualism.

Part three of the book starts with chapter eleven by Kalaja and Mäntylä, dealing with the first foreign languages taught in Finnish schools and titled “The Role of Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in English Classes as Envisioned by Student Teachers in Finland”. Using visual narratives of English student teachers’ envisioned future language classroom, the role they assign to multilingualism and multiculturalism is analyzed in terms of the pedagogies, classroom environment, and materials used. 67 drawings with a written elaboration of the students’ future classrooms were analyzed, using case studies and narratives. The drawings represent mostly monolingual English teaching or unelaborated multilingual pedagogies, some represent bilingual classes of English and Finnish, i.e., bilingualism and biculturalism with English as (sufficient) international learning affordance, and only one case shows a multilingual class, displaying several languages and possibly using them. These differences can be due to their previous learnings in pedagogical studies and can be interpreted as either traditional discourses of the language classroom or innovative ones.

In chapter twelve, titled “Visualising Interaction in Plurilingual Situations: What Do Future Teachers Think and How Do They Approach This Reality?”, Pérez-Peitx researches student teachers’ understanding of multilingual situations and classroom strategies to address multilingualism in the Catalan-speaking regions of Spain. Using visual narratives, 109 primary and early childhood student teachers first drew a multilingual situation and then a representation of themselves in that situation in the classroom. The findings—illustrating the context, interactions, people, and actions—showed that the students were aware of multilingualism in society but understood it as an accumulation of languages rather than interactions. In the classroom, some of them used language comparisons and include familiar languages.

The last chapter is authored by Ruohotie-Lyhty, Aragão, and Pitkänen-Huhta, and titled “Multilingualism in First-Year Student Teachers’ Visualisations of Their Professional Futures in Finland and Brazil”. The study explores the professional aspirations of language student teachers and how they understand multilingualism as a part of their envisioned professional identity in two contrasting sociopolitical contexts. Through drawings of their envisioned careers in ten years’ time, 61 Finnish and 60 Brazilian first-year university students illustrate their future roles. Systemic coding reveals multilingualism in only 28 Finnish and 8 Brazilian drawings. In both contexts, multilingualism is mostly linked to working abroad, while in Finland, it also relates to teaching immigrants or working as a multilingual professional. While these differences can result from sociopolitical

circumstances, the study also highlights several commonalities: using a foreign language, technology, travelling, and teaching.

The conclusion by the editors presents “Lessons Learnt and Future Avenues for Arts-Based Approaches in Applied Language Studies for Social Justice.” These include the power of some speakers’ privileges, commitment to social transformation by and for everybody, embracing multisensorial (not only visual) approaches, and concrete contributions to social justice in language education through visual methods. The editors highlight the need for a more intersectional perspective, especially within education for sustainable development, and an understanding of visual methods as diagnostic instruments, teaching materials, and reflection tools. Future researchers can build on intersectionality by adopting multisensory, arts-based methods and critically examining how overlapping identities—such as race, gender, and ability—interact with language to shape lived experiences of multilingualism and educational inequality.

Overall, the chapters follow a coherent structure and offer various insights into social justice in their introductions, and the lessons learnt and visual methods in their research questions or methodology sections. The topics covered include a wide range from biographies and identities to social environments between monolingual and multilingual ideologies, as well as native speakerism, and a set of cognitions, affections, and actions (i.e., beliefs, attitudes, emotions, visions, and agency) through multistoried visuals. While the book opens new pathways in fruitful directions, one key issue requiring further reflection can be raised: ethics. Even though ethical aspects are considered (anonymization of names and personal photographs, copyright of visuals, informed consent, and micro-ethics in participatory research), three issues arise from the contributions: 1) a possible ethical bias in selecting more aesthetic and richer visuals or choosing a “good” representative instead of one representing the larger population – this bias has also been discussed in other qualitative methods, such as interviews (Seidmann, 2006); 2) claiming the right to be the author or artist of the visuals published – a question already raised by Moore (2024); and 3) offering participants a return for the time they used to design, discuss or interpret the data (Tuck & Yang, 2014).

Finally, this book is a timely and valuable contribution that broadens the scope of multilingual research and calls for further ethical and methodological reflection. Future studies can address ethical gaps by ensuring inclusive visual selection, recognizing

participant authorship, and providing fair compensation or reciprocal benefits for participants' time and creative contributions.

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Lisa Marie Brinkmann  is a research assistant at the University of Hamburg. Her research focuses on the learners' investment, methods to promote plurilingualism in education, such as the use of portfolios or linguistic landscapes, and intercultural learning, as well as critical pedagogies in blended mobility programs. She is part of the Erasmus + project BOLD (Building on Linguistic and Cultural Diversity) and the Erasmus Teacher Academy LITE (LinguaTech: Advancing Digital, Inclusive and Multilingual Teaching Practices) and coordinated four projects in the “Transcultural encounters in Spanish Teacher Education” series since 2022, funded by Innovative learning and teaching formats of University of Hamburg and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

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