



**Middlesex
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INCLUSIVE MULTILINGUALISM: A TOOLKIT FOR EDUCATORS

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Our Intentions

This toolkit is designed for educators, faculty members, and support staff who work with multilingual students. We aim to offer you some useful guidance on how to capitalise on the multilingual and diverse nature of your students in order to help them thrive in higher education. We have curated this advice based on empirical research and a literature review conducted by the project team. This toolkit provides adaptable resources for staff to raise awareness of multilingualism as a hidden resource and to share pedagogic best practice.

Promoting this kind of linguistic hospitality aligns well with Middlesex's focus on 'Equity and improvements in health and wellbeing', 'Inclusive socio-economic development and enriching lives through culture', and 'Sustainability of communities and the environment' as well as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals of '4. Quality education', '10. Reducing inequality', and '3. Good health and well-being'.

The toolkit is arranged around the following main sections:

1. Introduction to the context and to our research project
2. A definition of Multilingualism (ML)
3. Students' multilingual profiles
4. Reasons for promoting ML at universities
5. Practical tips on how to capitalise on ML
6. Questions to inspire further conversations

While this toolkit contains practical recommendations, our aim is to go beyond the potentially instrumentalist approach of a best practice guide. Instead we'd like to open up a space for ongoing conversations that embrace a transdisciplinary approach to exploring the complexity of multilingual ways of being in a constantly changing and relational world.

Brief Introduction to the Research Project

This research project explored an overlooked aspect of equality, diversity and inclusion, which is the linguistic plurality of higher education students and staff. Many students and staff draw on a wide range of linguistic repertoires in their daily lives, which impact on their identity and their ability to engage with their academic programmes, but this rich resource is often neglected in the HE setting to the detriment of full inclusion in university life. This project builds on the findings of a previous project (Lazar and Ryder, 2017) which explored how educational developers can incorporate a language-aware approach to feedback when working with staff involved in learning and teaching.

This current project is set in the context of Middlesex University and aimed to address the lack of existing data around multilingual repertoires and to investigate students' and staff experiences. It relied on a collaborative research approach and involved a variety of students and academic and support staff from all the Faculties at the University.

To address the lack of reliable data, we conducted a linguistic survey among students on different programmes, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level. This provided a snapshot of the full range of languages, dialects and varieties of English students use, and the different purposes for which they are deployed, information which has not been captured hitherto in any university data.

Building on the findings of the survey, we ran two creative workshops with the academic and support staff as participants to collaboratively brainstorm pedagogic approaches, classroom activities and forms of assessment which draw on students' multilingual resources as part of the curriculum so as to promote greater 'linguistic hospitality' (Phipps, 2012) in the university. We have incorporated the suggestions made and issues raised in these workshops in writing our Toolkit.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Education Research Ethics Committee.

What Is Multilingualism?

Multilingualism refers to the "ability to use three or more languages, either separately or in various degrees of code-mixing. There is no general agreement as to the degree of competence in each language necessary before someone can be considered multilingual". (from Oxford Reference)

We conducted a pilot survey to establish the multilingual nature of our students. The findings confirm that ML students are not a homogenous group and that there is an incredible range and variety of languages used in different contexts by the students. 152 students across 22 different programmes (healthcare to business, law, education, science, computing, social science) completed our survey. Altogether they had knowledge of 75 different languages. The level of proficiency in terms of reading, writing, speaking and listening in different contexts (home, study, work, family, friends, religion ...etc.) varied considerably.

Student Profiles

The following profiles from the survey illustrate the rich linguistic diversity of our students:

Awareness of such varied linguistic repertoires of students can help tackle negative and deficit assumptions made about their identity and proficiency in using English for academic purposes. There needs to be also recognition that some students prefer to communicate solely in English in a professional or academic setting despite their knowledge of other languages.

PROFILE 1

A student currently in Year 1, under the age of 25. The student was born in and accessed education in the United Kingdom.

In primary school, the student used English, Russian and French; in secondary school, the student used English, Russian, French, and Arabic; while at university, the student uses English, Russian and Arabic.

The student identifies his or her mother tongues as English and Russian. The student uses English for study; English and Russian for work and for leisure and entertainment; Russian with family; English with friends and Arabic for religious practices.

The student feels very comfortable and confident when using English and Russian in listening, understanding, speaking, reading and writing; neutral with listening and understanding in Arabic and French, but not comfortable when speaking, writing and reading.

The student reported that speaking Russian fluently helps him or her in a variety of environments, particularly at work and the ability to communicate with other people from Slavic backgrounds.

PROFILE 2

A student currently in Year 1, over the age of 25. The student was born in and accessed primary and secondary education in Zambia. The student identifies his/her mother tongues as English, Lozi, Tonga, Bemba, and Nyanja.

For study and work purposes, the student uses English; for the purpose of communicating with family and friends, leisure, and entertainment, as well as religious practices, the student uses English, Lozi, Tonga, Bemba, and Nyanja. The student feels very comfortable and confident when using English in listening, understanding, speaking, reading, and writing.

The student feels very comfortable and confident when using Nyanja, Bemba and Lozi when listening, understanding, and speaking, but little confidence and comfort is self-reported with Nyanja when writing and reading, and less confidence in reading and writing with Bemba and Lozi.

PROFILE 3

A student currently in Year 3, over the age of 25. The student was born in and accessed primary and secondary education in Malaysia.

The student identifies his or her mother tongues as Malay, English, Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka and Mandarin.

For study and work purposes, communicating with family and friends, leisure, and entertainment as well as religious practices, the student uses Malay, English, Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka and Mandarin.

The student feels very comfortable and confident when using Malay and English in listening, understanding, speaking, reading, and writing. The student feels neutral when using Mandarin when listening, understanding, and speaking, but little confidence and comfort is self-reported when writing and reading.

Why Promote Multilingualism at University?

A large number of Middlesex University staff and students are multilingual as highlighted by our exploratory survey. Their other languages form a key part of their identities. We advocate for recognising their multilingualism as an asset and part of significant cultural capital, rather than a deficit.

Bi- or multi-lingual students have access to an extensive range of resources for knowledge-making, yet these often remain invisible or even stigmatised in the case of minoritised students despite the fact that students may actively be using them for studying.

Multiple studies have shown that multilingual students use their different languages in the academic setting to comprehend and delve deeper into subject matter, to develop critical thinking and foster an intercultural mindset (Marshall, 2020; Moore, 2016; Preece, 2020; Preece, 2022). They may also have higher levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy and agency (Piccardo, 2013).

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives do not often take account of language, yet if we wish to be truly inclusive we need to consider this key element of people's identity and cultural capital.

How Can We Promote Multilingualism at University?

Smith et al. (2017) suggests three levels of pedagogical engagement with the use of other languages in studying:

- (1) allow, which seeks to normalise the presence of different languages;
- (2) encourage, which involves giving positive encouragement for the use of different languages; and
- (3) enable, which suggests more in-depth thought as to how to use different languages to deepen learning.

Drawing on an extensive literature review and the contributions of colleges in our workshops, we have identified 5 main ways to capitalise on the linguistic repertoire of students:

HOW TO CAPITALISE ON THE LINGUISTIC REPERTOIRE OF STUDENTS?

1. Foster a translingual mindset
2. Encourage crosslinguistic comparison as a pedagogic strategy
3. Capitalise on the informal use of languages for study
4. Incorporate multilingual awareness into the curriculum and assessment design
5. Encourage community engagement and employability

1. Fostering a Translingual Mindset

We can promote multilingualism at university by encouraging the development of a 'translingual orientation' (Andrews and Fay 2018), rather than stigmatising the use of other languages.

- Consider where your personal views lie along this spectrum and where your colleagues in the same programme team are positioned. Can we go beyond 'allowing' and 'encouraging' to 'enabling', and consider ways (with our students and colleagues) in which the use of different languages can deepen learning?
- Encourage students to share information about their own linguistic and cultural background. Actively create and promote opportunities for students to interact with others from different linguistic backgrounds.
- Use students' own experiences and linguistic repertoire as a springboard to learn more about the English language and British culture.
- Check understanding of the idiomatic use of language (e.g. proverbs: there're many ways to skin a cat). Ask students how that expression might translate in their own language.
- As an academic, consider leading by example and share your own cultural and linguistic background.
- Employ lecturing staff with particular linguistic expertise to work with particular student groups (Odeniyi, 2022)
- Acknowledge our students' multilingual resources publicly in the classroom, and invite them to discuss how they might use them in studying

2. Encourage Crosslinguistic Comparison as a Pedagogic Strategy

Many students attend university in the UK because they wish to improve their English language skills and learn about the culture. Using crosslinguistic or cross-cultural comparisons as pedagogic strategies can help them build up their expertise.

- Be aware that some key academic concepts (e.g. reflection, formative feedback) do not have a direct translation in other languages. Providing examples and using the words/ concepts in context can help with understanding.
- Explore cultural and linguistic assumptions with students in terms of communicating and understanding others in educational and professional contexts. For example, "Do you mind doing this?" Vs "Can you do this?"
- Promote the support offered by the Learning Enhancement Team (LET) in improving academic English for students

3. Capitalising on the Informal Use of Languages for Study

There is evidence in the literature and our research also confirms that students often use multiple languages informally for study. We can promote multilingualism at university by celebrating the informal use of other languages in the classroom and actively promoting the use of these languages for study purposes.

Encourage students to

- Use dictionaries to create bi and multi-lingual glossaries. This is especially useful to build up vocabulary of specialist terminologies
- Translate key words or phrases when working in groups or pairs while paying attention to who may be included/excluded by so doing
- Write notes in a mixture of languages if that is helpful to them

- Use curated specialist translation sources or specialist dictionaries, as well as incorporating critical discussion about more generic tools (such as Google Translate) as part of information-literacy education
- Share other strategies for using their multilingual repertoires to study with their peers

4. Incorporating Multilingual Awareness Into the Curriculum and Assessment Design

Building on multilingual students' natural tendency to use languages informally for study, the following activities could be intentionally incorporated into the curriculum.

- Design classroom activities and assessment tasks so that they enable students to draw on the personal experience and studying made accessible by using other languages

EXAMPLE 1

Students interview family members or members of their own community in a language of their choice to complete a task relevant to their curriculum

EXAMPLE 2

Students use resources (such as videos, newspaper articles or academic sources in another language) to complete an assessment task such as a poster presentation.

- Support these practices by establishing clear ground rules around what needs to be translated, and emphasising that precise referencing information needs to be provided
- Discuss the possibility of multilingual research openly with colleagues and students so that an agreement can be reached within a module or programme. This would allow students to do interesting and novel research in different contexts and include traditionally underrepresented groups in research studies. Appropriate supervision would still need to be in place to be able to supervise students appropriately.

EXAMPLE 1

Encourage postgraduate students, particularly those at PhD level, to draw on research resources in other languages.

EXAMPLE 2

Consider collecting data (interviews, questionnaires, etc) in other languages.

- Use case studies of global companies or ones that explore the linguistic and cultural aspects of working in professions to allow students to reflect on learning from and working in such contexts.

5. Community Engagement and Employability

We can promote multilingualism at university by utilising students' multilingual resources to link with local community initiatives which promote both citizenship and enhance students' future employability.

- Supplement classroom learning by creating opportunities in placements or volunteering in which students use their languages to develop further professional expertise
- Raise awareness amongst students as to when using other languages in the classroom or at the workplace is appropriate or desirable. For example, casual use of other languages in professional environments can help build relationships, but in certain professional context (healthcare, law..etc.) specialist translators are usually used when working with clients or patients.

EXAMPLE 1

Trainee teachers use their multilingual skills to enhance the learning of their multilingual pupils (Safford and Kelly 2010)

EXAMPLE 2

Students help create a video for speech therapists working in multilingual communities (Matras and Robertson 2017)

Where Next?

This toolkit was designed for educators to offer guidance on how to capitalise on this 'hidden resource' of our students that they get the most out of their studies and flourish both at university and beyond.

We would like to use our research to encourage further conversation on this complex issue and welcome contributions and opinions that would help us all explore this further. Please do get in touch with us if you would like to continue the conversation or explore how you might apply these ideas to your own pedagogic or research practices.

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