Comparative Review Essay

Multilingualism in Migrant Contexts

Connecting School and the Multilingual Home: Theory and Practice for Rural Educators
Maria R. Coady (2019)

Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters. Pp. 152

Multilingualism in European Language Education
Cecilio Lapresta-Rey and Ángel Huguet (2019)

Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters. Pp. xxi+219

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These two books, authored by Maria Coady (2019) and Cecilio Lapresta-Rey and Ángel Huguet (2019), attempt to shed light on affordances and challenges associated with implementing plurilingual pedagogies while involving families and communities to support multilingual learners in school settings. Through an in-depth analysis of school language policies and plurilingual pedagogies, Coady (2019) and Lapresta-Rey and Huguet (2019) argue that linguistically minoritized students and their families are not sufficiently included in the mainstream classrooms and school communities. Moving forward, authors of both books present asset based approaches as solutions to achieving more inclusive educational systems.
The recent increase in migration mobility and globalization in school education has contributed to the need for more inclusive pedagogies that better serve multilingual learners in academic settings. The migration trends have considerably changed cultural and linguistic landscapes on school campuses around the world. Although linguistically inclusive pedagogies have become popular approaches in language teaching and planning in European and North American countries, it is important to gain insights into what constitutes effective plurilingual instruction for multilingual learners.

In the field of second language acquisition, multilingualism and plurilingualism are distinct. Multilingualism is referred to as ‘the knowledge of a number of languages or the coexistence of different languages in a given society’ (CEFR, 2001:4). In contrast, plurilingualism is defined as ‘the interrelation and interconnection of languages (...) in relation to the dynamic nature of language acquisition’ (CEFR, 2001:4). The difference between plurilingualism and multilingualism lies in the focus of interrelationship between languages. While plurilingualism emphasizes flexibility in using different languages, multilingualism lacks the focus of interconnection between the languages (Piccardo, 2018).

The notion of an individual’s linguistic repertoire, commonly used in research literature on plurilingualism, is a key term that includes not only linguistic but also emotional dimensions of language (Creese and Blackledge, 2010; Blommaert and Backus, 2013; Busch, 2015). As seen through the plurilingual lens, learners are able to exploit their hybrid, constantly changing, and constructively unbalanced linguistic repertoires. However, multilingual teaching practices allow learners to use their first language as a tool to learn additional languages without drawing on learners’ whole linguistic repertoires (Moore, 2010).

In this comparative essay, after providing summaries of the two books, authored by Coady (2019) and Lapresta-Rey and Huguet (2019), we consider the following key points which are addressed in the both volumes. Firstly, we investigate the ways in which key stakeholders in the education system use their position toward developing an understanding or perception of plurilingual practices in education and in multilingual communities. Secondly, we reflect on some language planning policies and educational practices that are currently in place and consider whether there are others that are being developed in order to meet the needs of multilingual learners. Finally, we highlight the experiences of families belonging to migrant communities in accessing learning that recognizes their linguistic and cultural diversity. These objectives aim to reflect a clear image of how both books are important resources for understanding plurilingualism in two international regions, which could serve as a valuable point of reference for similar migrant communities around the world.
Many rural communities of Florida in the United States are home to a growing number of multilingual migrant families. These families, according to Coady, exist in the peripheries of the mainstream educational context. With regards to parental involvement, administrators and language policy planners continue to fall short of ensuring equitable access to an education that meets the needs of this culturally and linguistically diverse population. The school to home and home to school connections are dated, and do not take into account the barriers to access that multilingual migrant families encounter in their efforts to support their children’s learning.

In Chapter 1, Coady explains five guiding principles that help to differentiate rural multilingual family engagement across reflection and action. These principles include ‘(...) listening to and learning about multilingual families’ cultures, languages and literacy practices; reflecting on families’ strengths and gaining input from community members; communicating and building relational trust with families in ways that align home cultures and languages to schools; using knowledge of families to support students’ learning; and advocating for equity and change in and outside of the school’ (p. 41). These principles frame the subsequent chapters, which focus on reflexive pedagogical practice, and opportunities for creating space for these families in traditionally non-diverse educational contexts.

Chapter 2 explores the existing problem of cultural disparities between the school and the home. Coady draws upon Freire’s conscientização, or critical consciousness, as a means of explaining the goal of education as creating opportunities for minoritized populations to engage in action-oriented work that challenges the oppressive structures that restrict their positionality and power in society. In Chapter 2, she elaborates on this call to action, exploring the potential for a shift toward family centered differentiated engagement, as opposed to school centered engagement. Through her exploration of models of involvement, she concludes that engagement requires an understanding of both the local and global contexts in which rural multilingual families live.

Chapters 4 and 5 caution educators against essentializing families, working from the assumption that educators sometimes assign the same attributes to all rural migrant families, thus failing to take into account the diversity of their home countries, dialects, and variety of customs. The author advises educators to pursue classroom practices that not only create space for migrant learners, but rather, affirm and celebrate their linguistic identities and their cultural ways of knowing. Educators in these contexts sometimes privilege one form of literacy or parenting over others. For example, rather than assuming that these children’s parents do
not read bedtime stories to them because they are disinterested in their children’s literacy, perhaps educators should consider that this is a practice inherent to white mainstream culture, and is not common or natural for others.

In Chapters 6 and 7, Coady uses the ecological social systems theory as a framework for understanding the intersectionality of rurality, poverty, and immigration for Latino families in the United States. Through this framework, one is prompted to consider how multilingual students’ interaction with education is influenced by the larger systems that surround them. For example, educators must consider not only the child as a member of the classroom, or of the school community, but rather, they must consider the child as a member of the community at large, where migrant identity assumes different meanings in different spaces and to different people at different times. Chapter 7 considers the role of the community and community agencies, which, according to Coady, should play a crucial role in bridging the cultural and linguistic divide between the migrant families’ homes and the schools.

In the concluding chapter, the impact of ascribing the term ‘rural’ to these communities is considered. She contemplates whether this applies a sense of pressure or empowerment to the families that inhabit the space, and to the educators that work there. She explains that the labels mean next to nothing unless and until they are acted upon. With regards to her experience with the district that provides the basis for this book, the term ‘rural’ provided a degree of empowerment, reinforcing the commitment that rural educators have to their communities and to their student populations. She notes that the shift toward more inclusive family engagement and recognition of multilingualism in the classroom is not at all farfetched, but well within reach as educators seek to understand and work alongside the families to develop trusting relationships and to support their involvement in their children’s learning.

While Coady’s primary intention for this book is to address the untapped funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, and González, 1992) in rural educational settings, she also addresses the need for educators’ use of plurilingual pedagogy in the classroom. She acknowledges the standardization of education as a worrying threat to those students and families who come from different language backgrounds. She notes that in prioritizing not only mainstream languages, but also mainstream ways of knowing, the education system ultimately establishes barriers for linguistically diverse students and their families. In Chapter 2, she notes that the discrepancies between the culture of the school and the culture of the home alienate students from their teachers and classmates. With reference to Ladson-Billings (1994), Freire (1997), Cummins (1981, 2000, 2008), and
Cummins and Early (2015), she considers pedagogical approaches through a strengths based perspective that is person centered. Through this lens, she explains how educators, administrators, and educational policy planners might adapt current classroom practices and pedagogical approaches to better reflect and respect the linguistic diversity of their students, so as to support the development of trust and build stronger relationships between the home and the school.

In pursuit of this goal, Coady acknowledges several areas in which she believes schools are falling short of integrating their migrant populations. Each chapter begins with an explanation of a real scenario in which she alludes to the limitations of current school to home connections. In her explanation of these scenarios, the author sheds light on the cultural differences between the educators and the migrant families, exploring how these differences manifest in the classroom and in the greater school community. These scenarios serve as a springboard from which the author then delves into educational practices that would encourage educators to better understand the needs of their migrant student populations.

These practices are centered around the family and the community. In Chapter 4, a table is presented that would be beneficial to educators working with migrant families in rural educational contexts. This table includes a list of information that educators ought to know about the students and their families, as well as how the educator may access this information, and finally, the ways in which this information should factor into their classroom practice and student learning. Through this chart, Coady is able to communicate the importance of not only connecting directly with the students’ families, but also with the community organizations and cultural experts that can act as important liaisons between the two groups. The author might have considered including the work of Carol Benson (2002, 2004, 2005), who has written extensively on the importance of mother tongue based education for minoritized students in formerly monolingual contexts.

While Coady explores these multilingual classrooms using a qualitative methodology, Lapresta-Rey and Huguet consider the ramifications in European multilingual contexts through a quantitative approach. Recently, European policies have focused on the importance of languages in enriching the European cultural heritage through plurilingualism. According to Lapresta-Rey and Huguet, plurilingualism is considered a determining factor for social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and European construction as well as economic competitiveness, employability, and mobility (Council of Europe, 2007; Maalouf et alii, 2008; Cavalli, Coste, Crișan and van de Ven, 2009). To build on that, the objective of Lapresta-Rey and Huguet is to provide the reader with a deep, clear, and rigorous picture of the management of multilingualism in different European educational
systems, taking into account the historical, sociolinguistic, and political conditions that have influenced and are influencing the current approach. Consequently, this book is considered a good resource as a course material that focuses on education, bilingualism, or multilingualism in Europe.

The literature in this book makes it a rich resource for scholars, professionals, and students who are looking for a 360 degree picture of the emerging multilingual policies and practices in major regions across Europe. The continuous changes in the European population will inevitably be reflected in its linguistic evolution, thus in each chapter of this book, readers explore the historical context of multilingualism in one of ten European regions, consider how languages are handled in education policies, and finally, reflect upon the implications and solutions. Moreover, statistical charts, tables, and diagrams are displayed in support of the literature.

The ten European territories discussed in Lapresta-Rey and Huguet are organized by geographic location: Catalonia, the Basque Country, Asturias and Andorra (southern Europe), France, England, the Netherlands (Western Europe), Romania (Eastern Europe), and Latvia and Finland (northern Europe). All ten chapters include a sociolinguistic, historical, and legislative or political linguistic contextualization, in order to explain how languages are handled in the educational system, stressing the challenges and potentials in each area of study. Therefore, not only is a comprehensive vision of each region offered, but also an overall group outlook is presented, allowing comparison and a holistic understanding of multilingualism in European education.

In Chapter 1, the authors consider the language in education policies in Catalonia. Catalan is the largest minoritized language in Europe, which has been in focus over the past decade. Moreover, Catalonia has been providing opportunities for expanding bilingualism and biliteracy for all students, aiming to include a third language in the future. According to the authors, what makes studying this region beneficial is its linguistic and cultural heterogeneity, as well as its inclusive approach to this heterogeneity. In Chapter 2, the Basque region is brought into focus. The authors analyze the historical evolution of language management within the education system. This region was deprived for years of its language, using Spanish as the language of instruction instead. Thus, the recovery of its language and the recent arrival of immigrants are important points raised throughout this chapter.

In Chapter 3, the authors discuss the fact that in Asturias, two languages, Asturian and Castilian, are used, but both unofficially. The result has been that the Asturian ended up in a secondary position in the educational system. Hence, there is a need to balance the legal status of both languages in order to better serve the
diversity of the region. In Chapter 4, the authors explain how the region of Andorra hosts a variety of languages such as Catalan, which is the official language, as well as Spanish, and French. It has been noticeable that the rapid demographic change in the country is reflected in the increase of its population which is attributed to immigration. This region has three educational systems, which cater to the three main languages: Andorran, Spanish, and French. This makes Andorra an exceptional multilingual and multicultural region. Multilingualism in France is discussed in Chapter 5, as the languages of immigrants must be added to the regional languages. This creates some challenges such as the importance of reviving the regional languages, while also attempting to recognize the migrant languages. Hence, there are two multilingual paths in France; one caters to the elitist, or international languages, and the other to the minoritized languages of the migrant populations.

In Chapter 6, the authors examine the effectiveness of the language education policies in England in catering to its nation’s needs for foreign language skills. Moreover, it examines the different initiatives and efforts to reform school curricula to host multilingualism. Research has revealed that these efforts have not yet been fully successful, due in large part to incoherent strategies. Similar efforts have been made in the Netherlands, which is the focus of Chapter 7. In this chapter, the authors discuss the multilingual society of the Netherlands, where Dutch is the official language, which is used alongside immigrant languages such as Arabic and Turkish, and neighboring languages such as French and German. In addition, English is a compulsory language in primary and secondary education in the Netherlands.

Chapter 8 focuses on Romania, which is located in south-eastern Europe and hosts more than twenty different ethnic groups. Multilingual policies were introduced rather recently to cater to the diverse ethnicities in this region. Foreign languages were included in the compulsory education system, thereby promoting the importance of bilingualism. Despite its progress in promoting bilingualism in education, there is still much to be done in order to support the mother tongues of migrant children. In Chapter 9, the authors provide an overview of multilingualism in Latvia, which affords readers a better idea about the linguistic transformation in the three Baltic countries (i.e. Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania). The first part of this chapter discusses the languages used in this multilingual region, which are the dominant national languages (Latvian, Estonian, Lithuanian) and the Russian language (the main language of the former Soviet Union). In addition, other minoritized languages and the emerging international languages like English also figure prominently into the linguistic landscape of the region. The second part of the chapter looks into the educational policies of the region. In conclusion,
the book states that recently Latvia has supported more multilingual policies, including its promotion of international languages like English and minority languages like Latgalian in the region of Latgale in eastern Latvia. Finally, in Chapter 10, the authors highlight the sociolinguistic context in Finland, focusing on the switch between it being a sender of emigrants to becoming a receiver of immigrants. The chapter explains how educational policies cater to its Swedish, Russian, Estonian, and British communities.

To conclude, this book addresses the differences and similarities of how each region’s educational system has applied its policies to cater to the majority, minority, and foreign languages. It is recognized in the book that due to growing language diversity, it is important to incorporate this transformation in educational policies in order to reach a more cohesive Europe.

Lapresta-Rey and Huguet mention that policymakers, educational systems, local minorities, and migrant minorities are the major stakeholders who are concerned about handling plurilingualism in a way that will maintain the rights of minorities to practice their mother tongues, while also maintaining the coherence of the European population.

The book clarifies the differences between how local minoritized languages are being supported such as in Catalonia, and the Basque, Asturias, and Andorran regions, while efforts are still very much needed to support minoritized migrant languages in France, England, Romania, Latvia, and Finland, following the example of the Netherlands.

Lapresta-Rey and Huguet focus on exploring the differences between regions in their development of policies to cater to multilingual learners. In Catalonia, the declared goals of language in education policies have been providing bilingualism for all students, not just for minority speakers, while the goal is to include a third language in the future. By comparison, the Basque, Asturias, and Andorran regions focus on reviving their own languages, but they also focus on the recent migrant populations that add layers to their plurilingualism.

Today, France is considered to be a multilingual country, as it hosts migrants from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, France is working on reviving regional languages, while also catering to migrants’ languages. Moreover, it aims to overcome the barrier between elitist bilingualism involving major international languages, and minority bilingualism amongst migrants. Meanwhile, in England, research has revealed that their policies fail to acknowledge heritage languages, as they apply a cherry-picking approach to identify which languages they ought to teach. Hence, there is a great need for coordination of coherent synergies to support multilingual literacy.
Immigrant languages are used next to the Dutch language in the Netherlands, while English is compulsory as the first foreign language, which makes it a multilingual society. Hence the Dutch language policies demonstrate cognizance of the cultural diversity and multilingualism of the Dutch society.

Despite its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, multilingual language policies were introduced only recently in Romania. In Latvia, the educational policy is intended to allow for the acquisition of the Latvian as the main language of the society, while also making sure that the Russian-speaking population participates in Latvian mainstream society. Finally in Finland, the education policies support its highly multilingual society by adding the migrant languages as a second option after the national language.

Several warnings about immigrant linguistic segregation have been mentioned in most of the regions explored by Lapresta-Rey and Huguet. According to the authors, this is due in large part to their inability to break down the school boundaries and involve the rest of the education community in the language planning process. The authors, however, do not focus on the role of the educational systems in involving minority migrant families in their children’s language learning practices. Instead, the authors refer to the parents’ and families’ lack of involvement as posing a challenge to the goals of the education system. Therefore, it would have been a great addition to the literature to reference Extra and Yagmur’s *Urban multilingualism in Europe: Immigrant minority languages at home and school* (2004). This book sheds light on the increase of urban multilingualism in Europe due to migration. It offers multidisciplinary, cross national and cross linguistic perspectives on immigrant minority languages at home and in school in six multicultural cities across Europe.

Coady (2019) and Lapresta-Rey and Huguet (2019) offer a clear overview of the key terminology used in the books but differ in the way in which they conceptualize the key terms. Although Coady acknowledges the tension between using the terms that imply binaries, such as bilingualism and multilingualism, in her writing, she defines multilingualism as the key concept for the analysis, and offers only a brief description of translanguaging as a naturally occurring communication strategy in educational contexts where there is one dominant language, as illustrated by the examples from South Africa, the USA, and the Philippines. The author might have also used plurilingualism as a way of achieving more inclusive practices in family involvement activities since plurilingual pedagogies allow learners to exploit their whole linguistic repertoires.

According to Lapresta-Rey and Huguet, multilingualism is referred to as a ‘key value’ (p. 5) for the social and cultural cohesion in the European Union, while affordances of plurilingualism are seen as required components for maintaining
linguistic and cultural cohesion and promoting economic growth in European countries. Although the authors do not make a conceptual distinction between multilingualism and plurilingualism and use both terms interchangeably, they clearly state that multilingualism and plurilingualism play an important role for language policies in the European educational settings.

Interestingly, while Coady excludes plurilingualism from her analysis, Lapresta-Rey and Huguet consider both plurilingualism and multilingualism critical in developing linguistically and culturally sensitive educational policies and practices. To the authors of the two books, multilingualism is a way of ensuring more inclusive educational practices in the 21st century and achieving more cohesive communities and societies.

Coady (2019) and Lapresta-Rey and Huguet (2019) illustrate through well structured and very thorough analyses of the educational contexts and pedagogical practices that educators and policy makers should consider more asset based strategies that could better engage multilingual learners and their families. While Coady explores qualitative data, including interviews with educators and migrant families, real life scenarios, and educators’ reflections on school-community engagement practices, Lapresta-Rey and Huguet offer mostly quantitative data, including statistical charts, tables, and diagrams, supplementing this with interviews with families from migrant communities in their chapters.

Coady’s is a reflexive approach on qualitative data collected through interviews with Latino families and educators in Florida. Particularly, she presents a real scenario in each chapter where she highlights the limitations of current school to home engagement practices. By providing readers with her explanations of these scenarios, Coady effectively proves that a deficit based approach to school-community engagement practices contributes to a wider gap in achieving more effective communication between school administrators, educators, and migrant families.

Lapresta-Rey and Huguet also offer readers clear, well presented, and logical explanations of the quantitative data supporting the need for developing more linguistically and culturally inclusive educational policies in the European Union. Although there is no formal comparative data presented in the chapters, the authors carefully evaluate language policies and language teaching practices that vary greatly depending on the region and migration patterns in the European countries discussed in the book chapters. The authors also offer their readers a comprehensive look at how each country has managed multilingual practices while attempting to meet the needs of multilingual learners. The recommendations offered in the last chapter of the book include the call for more strengths based practices and more language friendly policies in educational settings while taking into account particular linguistic and socio-political contexts in Europe.
The authors of both books stated to some degree that family involvement initiatives are the key to establishing effective communication between migrant families and school communities. However, the scope of Coady’s evaluation of these engagement practices offers a more comprehensive picture of what constitutes effective ways to engage migrant families in school communities. She takes a pragmatic approach in illustrating how educators and school administrators manage to engage migrant families in schools. She provides readers with a list of practical solutions to achieve more inclusive practices and ensure a differentiated family oriented approach to increase migrant family engagement. She also convinces readers that a whole school approach may offer many benefits for ensuring that each migrant family is included in the engagement process.

Although the scope of Lapresta-Rey and Huguet’s book may not include the discussion of family involvement initiatives, the authors mention that the lack of parental involvement in the children’s learning process could hinder the learning progress. Perhaps an additional chapter on presenting quantitative data of parental involvement practices could be an asset in the later editions of the book as this may offer valuable insights for developing more language programs that meet the needs of the migrant population in each European country discussed in the book.

Coady (2019) and Lapresta-Rey and Huguet (2019) elaborate on the important notion of elitism in language learning. They caution readers that this may threaten language diversity in schools and hinder the attempts to preserve migrants’ heritage languages. In Lapresta-Rey and Huguet’s chapters, the authors offer statistics on perceiving only European languages and not the migrants’ first languages as foreign languages. They bring our attention to the need of providing more opportunities to learners in choosing a foreign language and equipping each migrant learner with equal rights in attempts to practise and preserve their first languages. Coady also states that only by moving away from elitist bilingualism, school communities may achieve a more inclusive approach in engaging migrant families and building stronger support systems for migrant students.

These books both shed light on the challenges facing educators in diverse plurilingual contexts, while also addressing these challenges by suggesting more equitable educational practices for linguistically and culturally diverse populations. The scenarios highlighted in both books would be of great value for researchers in the field of language in education policy, as they highlight the existing discrepancies between the learners’ diverse identities and the monolingual habitus that persists in mainstream classrooms, both in rural communities in Florida in the United States, and in increasingly diverse European contexts.

Coady’s asset based lens affords readers insight into the potential for embracing plurilingual pedagogy in migrant communities. As noted, this argument could be further elaborated upon by exploring plurilingualism as a defining characteristic
of the language policy and considering the dynamic nature of students’ languages in education. In pursuit of avoiding the essentialization of students’ languages and cultures, support for plurilingual pedagogy would align perfectly with Coady’s calls for the use of children’s funds of knowledge in the classroom. Lapresta-Rey and Huguet also assume an asset based perspective in their consideration of the European migrant context, focusing less so on bottom up parental and family involvement initiatives, and more so on the top down application of multilingual pedagogical policies.

This comparative essay analyzes two contexts within which plurilingual pedagogy is identified as the answer to supporting linguistically and culturally diverse minoritized populations. While Coady provides a qualitative analysis of the situation in rural Florida, Lapresta-Rey and Huguet explore various European contexts through a mostly quantitative methodology that affords readers an understanding of the sociolinguistic transformation of select European linguistic landscapes.

Both books address multilingualism as a way of contributing to more inclusive pedagogies. Coady’s work is important in its advancement of the practical uses of plurilingual pedagogy, building upon the theoretical work of Creese and Blackledge (2010), Blommaert and Backus (2013), Busch (2015), and Piccardo (2018). Lapresta-Rey and Huguet’s work also builds upon this scholarship, reflecting on how plurilingualism in language education policies can alleviate the linguistic barriers encountered by migrant populations in European host countries.

Both authors encourage language as an asset-based pedagogy, and they suggest ways in which educators can look at what multilingual learners have to offer to the school community. Both books complement one another, in that readers can consider both the practical pedagogical strategies mentioned in the Floridian context, as well as the policy considerations that are noted in the European migrant contexts. Most importantly, both books provide information and considerations that are transferable to the globalized context, allowing readers from different parts of the world to draw parallels between the communities mentioned and other migrant or multilingual communities around the world where children are broadly experiencing multilingualism within a monolingual habitus in education.

References


(Received and accepted 25th June 2021)