

At the nexus of critical interculturalism and plurilingualism: theoretical considerations for language education

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Abstract

Across Europe education systems are experiencing increased numbers of migrants, immigrants and refugees in their classrooms. There is increasing emphasis on the idea interculturalism, yet there is little evidence that this will hold any more success than multiculturalism in terms of social cohesion. The aim of this theoretical paper is to explore the idea of interculturalism from the perspectives of two alternative onto-epistemological traditions, object-based and relational, each of which construct cultural and linguistic diversity in a different way. An object-based logic has its roots in colonialism and constructs cultural and linguistic diversity in a way that is binary, hierarchical and ultimately Othering of difference. A relational logic has its roots in Southern, Diasporic and Indigenous communities and constructs cultural and linguistic diversity in a way that dialogically engages with difference. We propose a pluriversal, plurilingual approach to critical interculturality as a way forward for decolonising classroom relations and we consider the implications of this for language education.

Keywords: Pluriversality; plurilingualism; decolonisation; critical interculturalism

Resumen

En toda Europa, los sistemas educativos están experimentando un mayor número de migrantes, inmigrantes y refugiados en sus aulas. Hay un énfasis creciente en la idea de interculturalismo, pero hay poca evidencia de que esto tendrá más éxito que el multiculturalismo en términos de cohesión social. El objetivo de este artículo teórico es explorar la idea del interculturalismo desde las perspectivas de dos tradiciones alternativas epistemológicas, basadas en objetos y relacionales, cada una de las cuales construye la diversidad cultural y lingüística de una manera diferente. Una lógica basada en objetos tiene sus raíces en el colonialismo y construye la diversidad cultural y lingüística de una manera binaria, jerárquica y, en última instancia, de diferenciación. Una lógica relacional tiene sus raíces en las comunidades del sur, diáspora e indígenas y construye la diversidad cultural y lingüística de una manera que interactúa dialógicamente con la diferencia. Proponemos un enfoque pluriversal y plurilingüe de la interculturalidad crítica como una forma de avanzar hacia la descolonización de las relaciones en el aula y consideramos las implicaciones de esto para la educación lingüística.

Palabras clave: Pluriversidad; plurilingüismo; descolonización; interculturalidad crítica

With globalisation and increasing migration, multilingualism is critical to intercultural understanding and cohesion in society. (British Council, 2018)

[O]ur current era seems to be characterised by multiple and reinforcing conflicts ... simultaneously affecting many societies in a globalised world. ... I have described this as a 'crisis of difference', which interacts with (and to an extent stems from) a multiplicity of other crises (economic, political, social, environmental, medical) which we are presently experiencing. (Grillo, 2017, p. 6)

1. Introduction

Across Europe the economic success of migrant workers, immigrants and refugees and their integration into mainstream society has been unstable. This instability is largely a result of national electoral choices, public opinion, and global economic instability. Politically, the idea of multiculturalism in Europe has been alleged to be a failure (Modood, 2008; Noak, 2015), with interculturalism being offered as an alternative that is valued for its focus on interaction and understanding between cultural individuals and groups (UNESCO, 2009), whereas multiculturalism has become associated with segregation, with cultural groups living in homogenous communities the structures of which did not facilitate interaction (Cantle, 2012). Interculturality is therefore seen as a tool for bridging cultural differences and for breaking out of multiculturalism's tendencies of social fragmentation and entrenched social divisions (Meer & Modood, 2012). However, as Meer and Modood (2012) and Aman (2015) point out, interculturalism is no panacea for intercultural understanding and social cohesion. The processes involved in intercultural interaction, communication and understanding are far more complex than often portrayed in policy documents (UNESCO, 2006; Council of Europe, 2008).

The aim of this theoretical paper is to explore these ideas from the perspectives of two alternative onto-epistemological traditions, object-based and relational, each of which construct cultural and linguistic diversity in a different way. We argue that an object-based logic has its roots in colonialism and, as such, constructs cultural and linguistic diversity in a way that is binary, hierarchical and ultimately Othering of difference (Kramsch, 2009). Alternatively, a relational logic has its roots in Southern, Diasporic and Indigenous communities and constructs cultural and linguistic diversity in a way that dialogically engages with difference and assumes that knowledge can only ever be partial and understood in relation to broader socio-cultural, historical, environmental, economic and political contexts. We contend that education systems across Europe, including formulations of multiculturalism, multilingualism and interculturalism, are currently based on an object-based, colonial logic. We propose that, in the context of the need for European education systems to take account of the multiple languages and cultures of newly arrived migrants and refugees, a critical understanding of multiculturalism, multilingualism and interculturalism is required. Our understanding of 'critical' in this context is informed by theoretical perspectives on pluriversality (Mignolo, 2018), and plurilingualism (Canagarajah, 2009). It is through an exploration of the nexus of pluriversality, plurilingualism and critical interculturality that we identify some possible ways forward for decolonising classroom relations in a way that benefits all students, not solely those who are migrants and refugees.

2. Multiculturalism or Interculturalism

The National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) defines multicultural education as an approach that “values cultural differences”, affirms the pluralistic nature of society, and “challenges all forms of discrimination [...] through the promotion of democratic principles of social justice” (NAME, 2019). Multiculturalism as an idea took hold in Europe during the time of mass immigration in the post second-world war era. It is founded on the liberal goals of respecting and tolerating cultural difference, goals that were bound with identity politics and expressed as protecting the rights of minority cultural groups within a society to retain their cultural identity (Levrau & Loobuyck, 2018). In many European countries this was seen in the political aim of integration rather than assimilation of immigrant populations. Educationally, the same liberal ideals that underpin political multiculturalism (freedom, justice, equality, equity, human dignity) underpin multicultural education (NAME, 2019).

In recent years, political multiculturalism, expressed as “state multiculturalism” by leading politicians in Europe (Mathieu, 2018), has come under attack largely for its perceived failure to integrate minoritized groups into mainstream society, and to respond effectively to the challenges of ‘superdiversity’ in twenty-first century. Superdiversity refers to the ‘dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade’ (Vertovec, 2007). Interculturalism, which emphasises “the dynamic which exists between groups, the ways in which they learn from each other through dialogue and reciprocity” (Ging & Malcolm, 2005, p. 127), has been proposed as the answer to the ‘problem’ of increasingly diverse national populations (Council Of Europe, 2008; Barrett, 2013; UNESCO, 2006, 2009, 2013). This has been associated with a shift from the liberal ideal of “diversity as a strength to diversity as a problem that needs to be overcome” (Joshee & Sinfield, 2013, p. 55). A similar shift is evident in European education policies where the principle of social justice has been replaced by the goal of social cohesion (Ariely, 2014; CoE, 2018), with intercultural and language education bearing some of the responsibility for this goal.

2.1 Interculturalism and language education

The move to interculturalism has shed a different light on the challenges of communication between individuals and groups who have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This has, by default, brought the fields of interculturalism and language education together as evident in the burgeoning literature that explores the intersections between the two (Kramsch, 2009; García & Byram, 2013; Barrett, 2013; Grillo, 2017). Explorations of the intersections of these fields provide a complex backdrop against which teachers are expected to develop the knowledge and skills to work in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms. For example, in England, although interculturalism has been strongly promoted by Ted Cantle through the government review into community cohesion (Cantle, 2005), multiculturalism is the idea that continues to have a strong hold in the imaginations of school teachers and to drive their practice. Similarly, multilingualism seems to have more purchase in the UK while plurilingualism is more embedded in continental European policy discourses¹. This

¹ Multilingualism refers to the presence of several languages in a given geographical area, regardless of those who speak them; plurilingualism is the ability to use more than one language – and accordingly sees languages from the standpoint of speakers and learners (CoE, 2016). Canagarajah (2009) contrasts multilingualism, where L1 influences the acquisition of L2, envisioned as a unidirectional flow, with plurilingualism, where all languages influence each other’s development and ‘More importantly, the competence in the languages is

situation is made even more complex when it is acknowledged that, whichever concepts are favoured, the ways in which they (whether multiculturalism, interculturalism, multilingualism, or plurilingualism) are put into practice may lead to similar outcomes that are equally 'othering' (Said, 1985; Modood, 2017) of difference if the underlying onto-epistemological tradition from which either approach is articulated is the same.

In the remainder of the article we therefore examine two onto-epistemological traditions, object-based and relational, and the alternative ways in which they construct cultural and linguistic difference. Our aim is to "dig into the potential wealth of different understandings of these particular terms and therefore enrich our academic perceptions of them by opening them up to other world epistemologies" (Guilherme & Dietz, 2015).

3. An object-based onto-epistemology

According to Anzaldúa (1987), 'In trying to become 'objective,' Western culture made 'objects' of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing 'touch' with them' (p. 67). Object-based ways of being and knowing are based on a structure that is binary, oppositional and hierarchical and is argued to be the product of colonialism (Said, 1985) and was used to justify the actions of the European colonisers as they sought to control and possess other (non-European) peoples and lands by force (Moreton-Robinson, 2014). One of the most invidious aspects of the colonial, object-based logic is that in assuming its own superiority it then views Otherness as a threat to its integrity - a logical consequence of which is to seek to eradicate Otherness and to present its own logic as the best (and therefore only) way to be as a human. In other words, to present its ways of being and doing as universal rather than culturally situated.

Although the world is now in a post-colonial era, a coloniality of the mind and being (Thiong'O, 1986; Maldonado-Torres, 2007) continues through what South American scholars call 'The Colonial World System' (Dussel, 2012) - a system that affects the systems and institutions of governance at national and supranational levels. The influence of the Colonial World System has been exacerbated by neo-liberalism, as in education where the Euro-Western model of education has been universally applied the world over (Grosfoguel, 2011).

Burbules (1997) discusses how the colonial focus on things as objects led to categorical thinking, a process by which categories are assigned on the basis of their similarity or difference to a stated norm, thus creating a binary of like / not like. Colonialism used the European cultural norms of the white, male, Christian and their version of what it means to be human, civilised, law abiding, and educated as the standard against which all other cultural norms were judged and seen to be lacking. A racialised discourse then developed around the most visible difference - that of skin colour - and became the key characteristic that would identify individuals and groups who were not white as inhuman, savage, lawless and uneducated. Not only does colonial, categorical thinking create fixed boundaries around cultural and linguistic groups so that static and essentialist ideas hold sway, but also the hierarchical structure creates an unequal power dynamic between those who hold the 'superior' position and place themselves at the centre, and those who are deemed 'inferior' and relegated to the margins. For example: in British citizenship surveys the broad categories for ethnicity, which is used as a proxy for race, place White as the category at the top, and all other categories that follow as non-white -

integrated, not separated' (p. 5). Rather than a focus on proficiency in each separate language, 'What is emphasized is the repertoire - the way the different languages constitute an integrated competence' (p.4).

Multiple/Mixed ethnic groups, Asian/Asian British or Black/African/Caribbean/Black British - and finally, at the bottom of the hierarchy, Other (Office of National Statistics, 2012).

3.1 Object-based thinking and its influence on (language) education policies and practices

At a policy level categorical thinking enables governments to identify where funding priorities might lie with regards to, for example, raising educational achievements of marginalised groups that are shown to be underachieving. It is the tradition of thought within which the ideas of multiculturalism and multilingualism are constructed. However, policy-makers rarely acknowledge the power dimension referred to above, which is unequal and heavily laden towards the dominant culture. For example, categories may become reified and there is the danger that “people are identified and identify themselves in terms of these categories, instead of vice versa” (Burbules, 1997, p. 101) and, as Gutierrez (1995) argues, policies are centrist and about keeping (even if unwittingly) one group in power. In UK policies, learners are categorised linguistically as native English speakers or speakers of English as an additional language (EAL), and culturally as mainstream (white, middle class, able) or ‘diverse’ (non-white, low socio-economic status, special educational needs). These terms are inscribed from the centre and put those so described, in an object-based way, at the periphery of a world that is white, Euro-Western, monolingual English speaking. It is also clear that once labelled an EAL learner the label continues throughout a student’s education,

the Department for Education (DfE) defines ‘first language’ as ‘The language to which a child was initially exposed during early development and continues to be exposed in the home or in the community’. For almost all EAL learners, this means that if they are an EAL learner when they start school at 3-5 years old, they will be an EAL learner throughout their education and their life. (The Bell Foundation, 2017, p. 1)

At a classroom level, categorical thinking can lead to those categories being perceived to be fixed and stable, rather than complex, fluid and permeable. In classrooms where there is a dominant culture / language, ‘incoming’ cultures / languages are seen to be lacking in relation to the dominant standard. The implication is that there is a category of monolingual language (English) into which the categories of bilingual and multilingual need to be inducted, which may engender a view that the home language of EAL learners needs to be replaced by the dominant language in school. In this scenario multilingual learners might feel they have to ‘pick’ one language to stick with, even in social situations, with the result that facility in the first language becomes eroded.

A further influence of colonial, object-based thinking is that language and culture are thought about as belonging to separate categories, and therefore potentially it would be possible to learn about each independently of other; one could learn about another culture without learning the language of that culture and one could learn another language without learning about the culture within which the language finds expression. This way of thinking, separating self from culture and culture from language, can be seen in the forms of language education that focus on the technical, linguistic features of a language and that ignore the richness of alternative cultural meanings that are conveyed through language. As Kramsch & Zhu (2016) argue, all language ‘bears traces of the cultural contexts in which it has been used, and contributes to shaping the identity of speakers of English’ (p. 40). Therefore any form of intercultural communication, as a social inter-action, will both bring this relation of culture, language and identity, and the power infused in social relations, to the fore which we now go on to discuss.

4. A relational onto-epistemology

Relational ways of being, doing and knowing are based on an idea of interconnectedness in which everything is a subject and that relations are therefore subject-subject rather than subject-object. A founding concept within the relational traditions is plurality - that is, ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies, and pedagogies are all referred to in the plural form because there is no one way of being or doing or knowing. Cultural and linguistic variations are found at all levels from the micro-individual to the macro-societal and it is the interconnectedness of these variations that helps us to form our identity and to understand what it means to be human. Mignolo (2007) refers to this alternative to the universalism of the colonial, object-based tradition as pluriversalism, a concept we return to later.

From this viewpoint, knowledge of a phenomenon only comes into being through relation with a different phenomenon, and its relation to the socio-cultural, environmental, economic and political contexts within which the phenomenon was created and has purpose. Central to this is the idea that difference is essential to an understanding of one's own cultures and identities. We come to understand ourselves through relating to and with each other in ways that go beyond superficial differences (e.g. skin colour, dress, gender, festivals) to differences that are not so evident (e.g. the deeper meanings of cultural practices and their significance to the community where they are practiced). The pluralisation of being and knowing assumes that there are as many differences within cultures and individuals as there are between them. For example, in classrooms where there is a dominant culture / language, as well as differences between groups, there will be differences within - the concept of man is necessary to understand the concept of woman and vice versa (difference between); and masculinity and femininity are traits that can be attributed to men and women (difference within) (Burbules, 1997). Even in an apparently monolingual community there will be variations in language experiences and use between families and communities.

A very different way to think about difference is to begin with the continuous, the blurry, the unstable, and to try to develop a language that allows us to make particular distinctions and to offer explanations without reifying our working concepts into categories or typologies. Rather than beginning with the presumption of sameness, then attempting to classify differences as deviations from some standard, a "philosophy of difference" begins with the concept of difference as a general condition, one in terms of which even determinations of "sameness" are made. (Burbules, 1997, p. 102)

Burbules describes the primary focus on differences as pre-categorical thinking (1997), a relation from which it is possible to identify similarities, which are better expressed as commonalities, rather than the other way around. He stresses that differences are enacted; they change over time; they take shape differently in varied contexts; and they always surpass our attempts to classify or define them. "They do not assume sameness, they are the conditions out of which we establish agreements about sameness. The word 'between' is itself a relational word: difference here is seen as a relation, not a distinction" (Burbules, 1997, p. 106). Our interpretation of Burbules' pre-categorical thinking is one in which differences exist as lived, enacted dimensions of, for example, people's language identities. The ways in which differences are enacted change according to the context of each inter-action – thus differences are always understood in relation to the context, whether social, material, spatial or temporal and with each inter-action new understandings about self and other will emerge. From these contextualised relations between differences it is possible to identify commonalities, but these commonalities will vary from context to context, from relation to relation, and so cannot be categorised in an essential manner. Categories from this perspective can only ever be temporary and fluid.

For example, although English as a first language speakers will all be fluent in English, the socio-cultural and geo-political contexts within which their English developed and found meaning will differ. The English of a 'Geordie'², will differ from the English of an 'Etonian'³, not only in their accents but also in their cultural referents, the linguistic features they use and the meanings they intend to convey. If language is understood from a relational, pre-categorical perspective, it cannot be separated from the culture within which it has meaning. Thus, language cannot be understood purely in terms of nationality or ethnicity; it must also be understood in terms of all the intersectionalities that contribute to identity.

4.1 Relational thinking and its potential influence on (language) education policies and practices

When viewed from a pre-categorical perspective, everyone in the classroom has different identities and different knowledges⁴ that they bring to the classroom space – identities and knowledges that potentially enrich learning if they are utilised in a productive way. It is this way of thinking that underpins the concept of plurilingualism. Educational research has many examples of how including pupils' knowledge in the curriculum enhances learning; in language and literacy education this is described as drawing on 'Funds of Knowledge' (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005, p.ix). Everyday funds of knowledge represent the knowledges of home and community and informal education, while academic and disciplinary knowledges represent the knowledges of the school and formal education. Relational pedagogies will ensure that space is given to enable different knowledges to relate to each other, in an intercultural, dialogic manner. Our understanding of relational pedagogies goes beyond acknowledging the central importance of teacher-learner relationships in education (for example, Noddings, 2003) to focus on all forms of relation or inter-action, and to be attentive to the differences between those in relation because, "each moment of relation with difference will bring the possibility of new understandings" (Martin & Pirbhai-Illich, 2016, p. 361). The aim is "not to resolve differences, but to recognise the tension between alternative epistemologies and to accept that there may be some differences that are beyond understanding, which does not mean they cannot be fruitfully explored" (Martin & Pirbhai-Illich, 2016, p. 369). In this respect, relational pedagogies will also focus "on the many kinds of relationships involved in the design of meaning: linguistic, cognitive, and social relationships between readers, writers, texts, and culture" (Kern, 2015, p. 233).

When applied to cultural and linguistic differences, a clear implication of pre-categorical thinking is that the language used to describe groups would need to change. These changes might be politically motivated when considering influencing policy, or socially motivated when considering educational outcomes in the classroom. For example, in the UK certain groups in the population are described as Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) (DfE, 2012). The term 'minority' is a category created on the basis of comparison with the white majority and is viewed as an objective description. A relational term, used

² Geordie is the term given to people from Tyneside, Newcastle in North England and refers to the accent with which they speak English. The Geordie dialect and identity are usually associated with people from a working-class background.

³ Etonian is the term given to students who attend Eton, an independent school in South England. Etonians are generally people from a middle to upper-class background who speak standard English (also known as received pronunciation).

⁴ We use 'knowledges' in the plural form to represent a pluralisation of ways of knowing, or an 'ecology of knowledges' (Santos, 2007, p.188).

by social justice educators in the UK and North America, is that the groups are minoritised (Gillborn, 1990) and marginalised. This reveals the active relation of the terms in reference to the white majority and the power imbalance between those who minoritise and those who are minoritised.

At the classroom level, a relational approach would therefore consider all students as being culturally and linguistically different to each other. From this perspective, all social interactions between teacher-student and student-student will be intercultural and through these intercultural interactions all will relate to a range of differences and come to understand aspects of their identity better, some aspects of which will be cultural and linguistic. Students might, through their differences, find commonalities and themselves create and name different groups to which they belong. In this process they would not be bound by pre-inscribed labels (although many of the labels they might choose are almost certain to be bounded by their socialisation up to that point). However, as Kramsch, (2009) and Norton (2013) argue, social interactions are infused with power and thus a critical approach to language learning within intercultural contexts is required, as is explored below.

5. Multiculturalism or interculturalism revisited

Grillo (2017) reminds us that both multiculturalism and interculturalism are “imagined concepts” (p. 10). It is our contention that, despite the attempts of proponents of either concept to identify clear differences between them, both concepts are currently predominantly located within a colonial imaginary that views phenomena as objects, that creates categories on the basis of sameness, that structures those categories along divisive, hierarchical lines, and that presents them as rational, neutral, and thus as uncontroversial and universal. The location of multiculturalism and interculturalism in a colonial imaginary enables us to speak to power.

Multicultural and intercultural policies have been portrayed as being founded on liberal ideals of tolerance, respect for cultural diversity, and promotion of a European identity that is “based on shared fundamental values, respect for common heritage and cultural diversity as well as respect for the equal dignity of every individual” (CoE, 2008, p. 4). Beneath this veneer is a colonial discourse that positions the increasing numbers of immigrants and refugees in Europe as an influx of otherness leading to a “superdiversity” that needs “managing” (CoE, 2008, p. 4) through integration into the dominant, mainstream society. Developing relevant intercultural competencies (e.g. intercultural communicative competence) is promoted as the solution to greater intercultural understanding and more effective integration. However, “all too often interculturalism seems to assume that dialogues are between equals, when usually the reality is that the relationships are asymmetrical” (Grillo, 2017, p. 172) and in Europe this asymmetry is partly explained by the fact that European national identities were “dialectically constituted through the mechanisms of colonial racism” (Aman, 2015, p. 150), hence some immigrants are more desirable than others. In this regard, it is our view that interculturalism will not succeed any more than multiculturalism and that both require an understanding of what it might be to also be located in a critical, relational paradigm.

6. At the nexus of pluriversality, plurilingualism and critical interculturalism

It might be inferred from our discussion of the two alternative onto-epistemological traditions that we are arguing for a replacement of the object-focused tradition with the relational tradition. However, to argue for a replacement of one tradition with another would be based on the assumption that one (object-focused) is inferior and the other (relational) is superior – which in itself is a colonial, object-focused either-or type of argument and would be no different to current educational debates (such as

the one between multiculturalism and interculturalism). What we are proposing is based on the assumption that there is no one way of being and knowing, but rather multiple, or plural, ways of being and knowing and that it is through putting these multiple ways into dialogue that we come to better understand each other and our place in the world. This is, *de facto*, an intercultural approach which, when combined with an explicit focus on issues of power and racism, becomes a critical intercultural approach to how societies respond to cultural and linguistic difference (Guilherme & Dietz, 2015; Grillo, 2017). In the following paragraphs we explore the implications of pluralisation for the cultural (pluriversal) and linguistic (plurilingual) dimensions of critical interculturalism.

Pluralism, in the context of relationality and difference, is the subject of much philosophical debate. However, the work that has had most influence in the field of education (for example Deleuze & Guattari, 1980; Buber, 1958; Derrida, 2000) is located in the Western academy. Education has, until recently, largely ignored theoretical perspectives from Southern, Diasporic and Indigenous scholars (for example Connell, 2007; Blackstock, 2007; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Anzaldúa, 2015), yet pluralism can only become fully plural if it is an onto-epistemological plurality which therefore demands that Southern, Diasporic and Indigenous theories work with and alongside those in the West. One such theory is that of pluriversality, a decolonial concept that Mignolo uses to call into question the concept of universality (Mignolo, 2013, p.2). He does not reject the idea that there is a universe, rather he rejects the universalisation of universal thinking, arguing that Western epistemology has universalised “its own concept of universality dismissing the fact that all known civilisations are founded on the universality of his own cosmology” (*ibid*). Pluriversality is a theory that understands the world as a world where many worlds exist. As a project pluriversality is not aimed at changing the world but at changing the beliefs and understanding of the world (Mignolo, 2018). It is a project that

has to be based on the assumption that [it] cannot be designed and implemented ‘by one ethnic group’, but has to be inter-epistemic and dialogical, pluriversal. Thus, border thinking becomes the necessary critical method for the political and ethical project of filling in the gaps and revealing the imperial complicity between the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality (Mignolo, 2007, p. 499).

Pluriversality is a theory that is gaining attention in the West and being applied in different contexts such as Human Rights Education (Zembylas, 2017), peace education (Sandoval, 2016) and Higher Education (Andreotti, Ahenakew, & Cooper, 2011). Conceptually it is allied to Buenaventura Sousa Santos’s abyssal thinking, which he defines as “as a system of visible and invisible distinctions that divide social reality as either on ‘this side of the abyssal line’ or on ‘the other side of the abyssal line’” (2007, p.1).

The division is such that ‘the other side of the line’ vanishes as reality, becomes non-existent, and is indeed produced as non-existent. Non-existent means not existing in any relevant or comprehensible way of being. Whatever is produced as non-existent is radically excluded because it lies beyond the realm of what the accepted conception of inclusion considers to be its other. What most fundamentally characterizes abyssal thinking is thus the impossibility of the co-presence of the two sides of the line. To the extent that it prevails, this side of the line only prevails by exhausting the field of relevant reality. Beyond it, there is only nonexistence, invisibility, non-dialectical absence. (p. 1)

Santos goes on to explore the possibilities for post-abyssal thinking which he summarizes as “learning from the South through an epistemology of the South”. Similar to the idea of pluriversality, post-abyssal thinking “confronts the monoculture of modern science with the ecology of knowledges”, which is a pluralization of knowledges that includes modern science and is founded on both the idea of the incompleteness of any one knowledge, and that knowledge is therefore “inter-knowledge” (Santos, 2007, p. 11).

Border thinking is identified as a key method necessary for pluriversal dialogue (Mignolo, 2007). Mignolo makes it clear that a pluriverse is “not a world of independent units” but “a world entangled through and through by the colonial matrix of power” that, to be understood, requires “a way of thinking and understanding that dwells at the interstices of the entanglement” (2018, p. xi) – that is, border thinking. He goes on to say that this is not something that can be achieved from a position outside the border, but that is an onto-epistemological approach that entails inhabiting the border. He found inspiration in Anzaldúa’s (1987) work on living in the borderlands. As a Chicana (Mexican-American), lesbian she lived in a place where she was neither one or the other but was expected to abide by the cultural expectations of both. In her borderlands she is both man and woman, culturally hybrid, a plurilingual speaker and writer. In these identities she does not embody the characteristics in the same way someone who is not in a borderland might but goes beyond them – for example, her understanding of maleness and femaleness goes beyond heterosexual understandings of these identities, her understanding of American and Mexican goes beyond single nationality understandings and so on.

These new configurations of identity resonate for us with Burbules’ pre-categorical approach to difference discussed earlier. Those who live in the margins, the borderlands, the in-between spaces of thirdness, are those who understand what it is like to negotiate the terrain that crosses the abyssal line. Listening to and learning with and from the scholarship of these borderlands and their ‘Mestizo’, ‘hybrid’, or ‘Métis’ locations is perhaps a way of moving beyond the dualisms of colonial, object-based thinking. This is a far deeper concern than the relational dialogism that is associated with interculturalism and its focus on multiple perspectives. A critical interculturalism is attentive to power differentials, it is also attentive to differences that are much more fundamental than perspectives – in other words critical interculturalism assumes a pluriversal world and is attentive to the onto-epistemologies of those in conversation and how, by dwelling in the third spaces or borderlands it might be possible to create hybrid identities, cultures, understandings that neither have to conform to the ways of being on one side of the abyssal line nor to the ways of being on the other side of the line.

In a similar vein, the Latin American concept of *interculturalidad* brings a new dimension to our understanding of interculturalism. In Spanish and Portuguese, and Ibero-American contexts *interculturalidad* has a very different discourse to that of interculturalism in Europe (Guilherme & Dietz, 2015). Contrary to the aims of tolerance, recognition and integration of diversity associated with Euro-Western framings of interculturalism, *interculturalidad* is a concept that is counter-hegemonic, that focuses on power imbalances, that starts with the needs of marginalised cultures, that incorporates Indigenous concepts, and that argues for political equality rather than acculturation of the oppressed (Mateos, 2011). Rather than a theoretical critical interculturalism, it is a praxis borne of the necessity of living interculturally for hundreds of years through imperialism and colonialism, but in ways that are different to Anglo-Saxon settler countries of North America and Australasia. Thus, as Mateos (2011) argues, one of the valuable contributions that Latin American *interculturalidad* can add to the largely northern and western-originated notions of intercultural communication or intercultural competence is its critical focus on power in the context of inter-actions and inter-knowledges within and between the diverse Latin American and Indigenous communities.

How does plurilingualism fit into this set of ideas vis-a-vis the context of language education and its importance for intercultural dialogue? Our focus here is not on the teaching of languages per se, but on how individuals and groups are viewed as language users - in other words on their language identities. A focus on language identities cannot be separated from a focus on cultural identities since language and culture are inextricably entwined (Kramsch, 1998), and the relation between the two will differ according to who does the defining and the knowledge base that they use to do so. At the level

of the individual, plurilingualism therefore seems to be an appropriate concept to work with when considering developing young people's identities with regards to achieving positive outcomes for living in increasingly plural societies. Plurilingualism means transcending categories, but this "does not mean denying their practical function, it means seeing them not as strait jackets but as practical yet constructed and flawed tools with uses and limitations" (Piccardo, 2017 p.10).

7. Implications for language education

In reviewing the literature as part of our preparation for this article, two things stood out: that there is a proliferation of terminology (Marshall & Moore, 2018), and that trying to bring the various perspectives with their differing onto-epistemological foundations into relation in a way that is neither syncretic (a union or fusion of ideas) nor a synthesis (a combination of parts to form a more complete whole) is a complex and challenging task.

With regard to the first point, we have conducted what might be called a spatial-temporal excavation of the onto-epistemological tradition of (object-based) thought that underpins the Western academy and therefore, whether acknowledged or not, much of the work in the fields of multicultural, intercultural and language education. We then explored the potential of a different onto-epistemological tradition of (relational) thought vis-a-vis how key ideas within cultural and language education might be differently constructed. This excavation has, for heuristic purposes, used a dualist framing of the two alternatives but, in accordance with Burbules' thesis on the grammar of difference, we do not see either tradition as internally homogenous or as being *solely* associated with one cultural group or another. It is also not our purpose to propose that relational thinking should replace that which is object-based; rather we argue, as Santos (2007) does, that each system has its internal and external limits, therefore the differences within and between them by putting them in relation with each other could be productive in making sense of the world.

With regard to the second point, we were aware that while the ideas of relationality and plurality are not new, they are also predominantly located in the same object-based, colonial grid that dominates the field and for this reason we turned to alternative theorizations of these concepts that are located in the Global South. As with our point that identities are culturally and linguistically plural, so the fields of intercultural and language education would need to draw on epistemologically and ontologically plural theories and practices. We see this pluralisation as central to the processes of critical intercultural dialogue and it follows that plural pedagogies will be needed to help teachers and learners navigate the complex terrain of the 'between' or third spaces and borderlands that pluralisation inevitably creates.

In her article in the first issue of *Langscape*, Kramersch (2018) shows how multilingualism and plurilingualism are ideas with underpinning ideologies, and it is only through revealing what those ideologies are that teachers can begin to understand how they might be differentially applied in practice. For example, the move from monolingualism to plurilingualism is a move from "multiple monolingualisms, i.e., the ability to speak several languages like monolingual speakers of those languages" to "the ability to use various linguistic repertoires and other semiotic resources to bring one's message across and to make sense of other people's messages across and between languages" (Kramersch, 2018, p. 22). In the context of the focus for this issue of *Langscape*, the implications for language education of migration movements and the pluralisation of cultural and language identities in Europe, the move to plurilingualism can be seen as both a recognition and a reflection of these increased mobilities. At the same time, the move from a multicultural to an intercultural ideology can be viewed in a similar light, to which we have argued, in common with other educators (Norton, 2013;

Aman, 2015; Grillo, 2017) it is essential to bring a critical dimension that foregrounds issues of power and assumes a critical pedagogy as advocated by Freire (1970) and Giroux (1985). However, because of the relationship between international migration to colonial legacies, and because these legacies are reproduced through relations between migrant and host populations, we argue that a pluralisation of pedagogies is required that include decolonial pedagogies of relation (Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017) and the border pedagogies of those who are in a constant state of living between and negotiating differences in the borderlands.

These are pedagogies that are rooted in the politics of difference, that identify and are critical of the binaries of colonial thinking, and that “undercut and/or find spaces between them in order to undermine the forms of domination which result from their taken-for-granted use” (Cook, 2000, p. 14). In terms of language education, taking account of the pluricultural and plurilingual nature of recent migration movements from Africa to Europe, requires a rethinking of “our conceptions of the immigrant students we encounter in our classrooms” (Norton, 2013, p. 190), an examination of our own identities as teachers and educators, and a rethinking of the nature of the educational relationships that are central to our work. For us this also requires:

- A critical awareness of the onto-epistemological foundations of Euro-Western knowledge;
- An understanding and ecology of knowledges, or pluriversity, in which it is understood that all knowledges have internal and external limits (Santos, 2007);
- Critical attention to the positioning of self and other and the discourses used to do this – i.e. how people are positioned in different texts, through different modalities, and how “each of these mediums also brings with it a particular social dynamic and set of power relations” (Kern, 2015 p. 251).

Our aspiration is more fundamental than the technical ‘fix’ for the so-called ‘problem’ of increased migration that the Council of Europe white paper on interculturalism implies (CoE, 2008). A decolonial classroom is one in which students and teachers view their differing cultural and linguistic resources and repertoires as enhancing the potential to maximise what can be learnt from each other through each moment of communicative inter-action. Plurilingualism, from this perspective, “is an enriching endeavour as an individual person’s experience of language in its cultural contexts expands ... and builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contribute and in which languages interrelate and interact” (Piccardo, 2017, p. 7).

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