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Recognising multilingual realities in ESOL

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Introduction

This paper is a summary of the keynote presentation which we gave at the NATECLA national conference in July 2017. We (the authors, James Simpson and Melanie Cooke) have been collaborating on research into the teaching and learning of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) since 2004: our first project together was the ESOL Effective Practice Project (Baynham, Roberts et al 2007), carried out as an activity of the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC). The NRDC was the research arm of the *Skills for Life* policy, and was active at a time when adult migrant language education in the UK was better supported in policy than ever before, or indeed since. In this paper we discuss an issue that has become an increasingly prominent concern for both of us. That is, while the reality of ESOL students' experience is increasingly a multilingual one, ESOL practice is typically oriented to a monolingual norm, and ESOL classrooms are not spaces where the full range of students' multilingual communicative repertoires are valued. Our arguments build on work we are currently carrying out on two projects with contemporary urban multilingualism as their focus. James is a Co-Investigator on the AHRC-funded Translation and Translanguaging (TLang) project, studying interaction in four cities in the UK, and Melanie is a researcher on the Leverhulme-funded Diasporic Adult Language Socialisation (DALS) project, examining language repertoires amongst Sri Lankans in London. Links to these projects are at the end of this paper.

We begin by introducing a perspective on multilingual language use which orients toward the user, rather than the language code, as we sketch out our understanding of a linguistic *repertoire*, and of the fluid multilingualism known as *translanguaging*. We then briefly summarise the two projects, the findings from which are informing our current ideas about translanguaging and the value of a translingual pedagogy for ESOL. In the final part of the paper we ask why a 'multilingual turn' has not reached mainstream ESOL classrooms, and we note that there are ideological as well as practical and professional reasons for the enduring monolingualism of ESOL teaching.

Our starting point is a quotation from John Gumperz and Jenny Cook-Gumperz, who, writing in 2005, noted that in political and policy debates about language in education, misconceptions about language use seem to dominate:

> The prevailing linguistic ideology in education has long supported the belief that bilinguals control two distinct languages: a native language or vernacular (L1) and a second language (L2), each with its own distinct grammatical system that is kept separate in the mind.
>
> (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz 2005: 2)

Linguistic ideologies are defined by Irvine (1989: 255) as 'the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests' That is to say, they are the sets of beliefs that people hold about language use and language users. The linguistic ideology discussed by Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz rests on what they term the code-separation view of language, which has at its heart the notion that a bi- or multilingual person's linguistic knowledge is compartmentalised, is separated out in the brain. This – maintain Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz – 'does not correspond to the facts of bilinguals' everyday communicative experience' (*ibid.*). They go on to say that: 'If we want to make instructional practice

support experience, we need to find ways of examining what it means to live with two [or more] languages' (*ibid.*). This then prompts us to re-examine the role of other languages in ESOL practice: practice which we believe should – as Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz say – support experience.

Studying language in superdiversity
The everyday communicative experience of ESOL students is typically complex and multilingual. The movement of large numbers of people from diverse backgrounds from all over the world creates spaces in the UK's urban – and increasingly its rural – areas where languages and cultures come into contact. We use the notion of *superdiversity* to describe the conditions created by the mass movement of people associated with globalisation, coupled with the mobility of the linguistic and semiotic message in online communication. The term superdiversity indicates a cultural and linguistic diversity of a type and scale not previously experienced. It was coined by Stephen Vertovec as a description of the 'diversification of diversity' (2006: 3) across multiple dimensions: places of origin, and also migration status, economic situation, motives for movement and so on. The complexity of superdiverse contexts has inevitably changed the way we communicate.

Understanding multilingualism in conditions of superdiversity requires a particular orientation towards language and language use, one which privileges its status as social practice rather than as a normative linguistic system. This draws us away from a sole reliance on a 'census' view of languages as 'countable institutions', and towards one which views languages as fluid, dynamic and socially constructed semiotic systems. In this respect we align with authors such as Makoni & Pennycook (2007) and Heller (2007), who explain that while *language* is a universal human attribute, *languages* are social inventions. That is, what distinguishes two languages is as much a social and political question as a linguistic one. And when a language user has to hand a number of different languages, the distinctions between them, as they are being used in the meaning-making process, can be inconsequential.

As we recognise that interaction in superdiverse contexts typically involves a fluid and dynamic multilingualism, so our empirical gaze moves away from the relationship between (societally-defined) languages and towards a focus on how speakers deploy the multilingual resources (languages, varieties, registers, styles) that constitute their communicative *repertoire*. The concept of *translanguaging* has in recent years gained currency as a way of describing and theorising the fluid multilingualism characteristic of interaction in the world's superdiverse areas (García & Li 2014, Li 2017). Translanguaging refers to how a speaker might potentially use their 'full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages' (Otheguy et al 2015: 283). Attention to repertoire and translanguaging has also highlighted the salience of multimodal resources and embodied action in the meaning-making process. Communicative practice involves not just the deployment of linguistic repertoires. We also need to take into account the ways in which people use all available semiotic resources – linguistic and non-linguistic – as they negotiate meaning. For ESOL students and their teachers, these resources might include translation, mime, gesture, a strategically simplified English, metacommentary, emoji, humour, and so on. Sites of practice, both in and outside ESOL classrooms, can be understood as places where

resources can be deployed – sometimes successfully and sometimes not – in translanguaging spaces and in translanguaging encounters.

Two research projects: TLang and DALS
We are both working on projects relating to multilingualism and ESOL – the TLang project, studying interaction in cities in the UK, and the DALS project, exploring multilingualism and language repertoires amongst Sri Lankan people in London. We will only summarise these projects here: the TLang project as it relates to ESOL was described in a recent edition of *Language Issues* (Simpson & Bradley 2017), and the researchers on DALS are at a preliminary stage in their work. Links to resources associated with the projects are listed at the end of this paper.

TLang and ESOL
On the Translation and Translanguaging (TLang) project James has been part of a team looking at language practices over time in work, social and home settings in four cities in the UK, Birmingham, Leeds, Cardiff and London. Our aim is to understand how people communicate multilingually across diverse languages and cultures, and our overarching research question is: How does communication occur (or fail) when people bring different histories and languages into contact? We are developing sociolinguistic descriptions of interaction in the domains of business, law, sport and heritage & museums, working with key participants in each domain, and in each of the four cities, to record their interactions at work in these environments, and in social spaces, and in the home.

Our findings emphasise how translation and translanguaging are important communicative resources, pragmatic means to get things done that could not be done without moving across languages, registers and discourses. These things might be encounters in shops or businesses or schools, consultations with legal advisors and advocacy supporters, and interactions in sports, social and family environments. The relevance of the TLang project and its findings to ESOL is clear. ESOL teachers typically know a great deal about the interactional challenges faced by their students, in general terms (e.g. they must find a job, or housing, they need to get advice about their immigration status, or talk to their children's teachers, or chat to colleagues or the neighbours). When it comes to the reality of the detail of their interactions, however, there is less awareness. What does a successful job interview actually look and sound like? What sorts of talk is it helpful when negotiating the housing benefits system? What precisely do people need to discuss with their lawyer, or their children's teacher, and how do they do so? How do people socialise multilingually? ESOL materials are sometimes not much help here: elsewhere we have critiqued the tendency to represent interaction in coursebooks and other published materials for ESOL students as simplistic and problem-free, and as flattening out linguistic and interactional complexity (Cooke & Simpson 2008; Roberts & Cooke 2009). What is notable in ESOL materials, and in syllabi, and consequently pedagogy generally, is the dominant monolingual orientation of the field. The Adult ESOL Core Curriculum (DfES 2001), which many ESOL teachers still use as the basis of their practice, is a monolingual document, as is the current iteration of the draft National Strategy for ESOL, being developed by NATECLA. English in many if not most ESOL classes is the only game in town. Hence ESOL practice fails to support students' experience, which as we have suggested, is – in these superdiverse times – typically translingual.

DALS and ESOL
Researchers on The Diasporic Adult Language Socialisation (DALS) project have been working with Sri Lankan people in London, exploring issues around their individual language repertoires, their experience of multilingualism in neighbourhoods, families, and networks, their intergenerational and transnational language use, and the ideologies which inform their understanding of their language use. The project also examines their learning of English: how do they learn, and with whom, and with what kind of community support? As an extension of the DALS project Melanie and a small group of practitioner-researchers are working with ESOL students with the following aims:

- To explore the question of how far the experiences of other diasporic groups resonate with the Sri Lankan Tamil experience revealed in the DALS data;
- To strengthen the relationship between sociolinguistic research and teaching, and to investigate whether and how explorations of sociolinguistic data can enhance ESOL pedagogy;
- To offer students a better sociolinguistic understanding of their own situations; and
- To explore practical ways of establishing a pedagogical approach that is more in tune with students' multilingual realities and those of the local community.

We have worked with two groups of students, a Level 1 group of 16 students from Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Morocco, Burundi, China and Italy, in a college in East London, and a mixed level group of 20 at a primary school in Streatham, with students from across Europe, South and East Asia and South America.

The main focus of the DALS ESOL project was to explore with students their understandings of language issues in their everyday lives, and for this we created a syllabus informed by knowledge from sociolinguistics which explored themes such as heritage language learning, code-mixing and language discrimination. At the same time, drawing upon similar emergent understandings of translanguaging as the TLang project, we have been working towards the development of a multilingual pedagogy for ESOL. This aims to acknowledge the role of learners' other languages in the learning of English, and to actively bring them into ESOL practice. In this practically-oriented project, we have explicitly allowed into class a full range of students' language repertoires: languages, varieties, styles and registers, which are used to support them as they engage with difficult or complex topics and content. A translanguaging pedagogy opens up interaction rather than closing it down, making space for students' multilingualism and multilingual ways of knowing, validating their multilingual identities and increasing their confidence. Fundamentally it contributes to a social justice agenda which recognizes language diversity and thus facilitates greater audibility, participation and citizenship for speakers of other languages.

Monolingual ideologies
Much of the class time in the extension of the DALS project has been spent exploring ideologies and beliefs about language. Some students have strong ideas about language-related issues, for instance which languages their children should speak at home, the rights and wrongs of alternating between languages, and so on. Some students have also expressed a belief that English only in their ESOL classroom was the best approach.

Students' beliefs and values – like everyone's – come from somewhere, and there are many reasons why they may hold these views. For example, they lack opportunities to practise English outside the classroom, which prompts them to suppose that they must maximise the time that they have in class to practise the language. There are strong ideologies at play too, at institutional and professional scales. Many colleges and centres where ESOL is taught have an explicit policy requiring students to 'speak English only in the classroom'. Professional teacher training courses still promote English Only in the classroom, reinforced by the monolingualism of ELT textbooks discussed above.

The personal, institutional and professional discourses about English Only in the ESOL classroom are redolent of, and indeed partly comprise, a way of speaking about language and migration in policy circles and the public sphere that help shape the policy landscape of adult migrant language education in the UK. This way of speaking, or *discourse*, informed as it is by language ideologies, relates to a central language ideological debate in recent years around the position of English in the construction of national identity, that is, the connection of the English language to the notion of 'Britishness'. Adult migrant language education is part of this debate, one in which migrant language learners frequently find themselves centre-stage.

Language, social cohesion and ESOL
The UK is very obviously multilingual, yet is nonetheless often represented as a monolingual state, or one that at best tolerates a degree of regional bilingualism in Wales and Scotland. The association of a British national identity with English is underpinned by an ideological position whereby in order for British society to be cohesive and stable, its population must share a common language. A 'one nation one language' ideology is evident not just in Britain of course: similar monolingualist discourse is a key feature of nation state-building almost everywhere. In UK language policy, even while ESOL in practice suffers some neglect, understanding, using and being tested in the standard language of the new country is not only a proxy for national unity, but is a *sine qua non* of integration and social cohesion.

This is clear from the tight relationship between English language use and testing (on one hand) and immigration policy (on the other). Prior to 2002 there were no specific requirements to show evidence of suitability for settlement through a language test or a test of knowledge of society. Today, people applying for settlement are required to pass an English language examination at level B1 on the CEFR in addition to the Life in the UK citizenship test, and a good deal of effort in the field of ESOL is expended in preparing students for assessments to satisfy government requirements for citizenship and naturalisation.

This relationship can be traced to a string of government-commissioned reports in the early 2000s which together promoted a discourse that projected a lack of English as a cause for community tension (Blackledge 2006). Khan (2016) maintains that these reports and the response to them lie at the root of the *securitization* of migrant language policy in the UK. He draws attention to the Cantle report, published in 2002 in the aftermath of social disturbances in towns across northern England between British Asian youths and far-right National Front supporters in the previous year. Cantle concluded that racially segregated 'parallel lives' dividing white British and British Asian communities were due in part at least to supposedly low English language

proficiency among the British Asians. This conclusion was picked up in comments around the same time by then Home Secretary, David Blunkett, who wrote of the 'schizophrenia which bedevils generational relationships' in bilingual families (2002: 77). This was one of many similar pronouncements by senior politicians which were to come in the following years, drawing a connection between cohesion and security and migrant language use. Three years on from 2002, immediately after bomb attacks in London in July 2005, Tony Blair, the former New Labour Prime Minister, said: 'There are people who are isolated in their own communities who have been here for 20 years and still do not speak English. That worries me because there is a separateness that may be unhealthy.' Some years on, the same discourse was evident in the rhetoric of another Prime Minister, David Cameron, who suggested in 2011 that immigrants who do not speak English cause 'discomfort and disjointedness' in their own neighbourhoods. It should come as no surprise then that new arrivals and more established residents alike feel under great pressure to gain access to the dominant language, English, even in the face of limited opportunities to do so because of cuts to ESOL provision in recent years (Martin 2017).

Conclusion: towards a multilingual ESOL pedagogy
The UK is moving into an uncertain post-EU future. Many migrant language learners are European Union citizens, and might have previously felt confident of a future in the UK. Now, their political belonging is not as certain as it was prior to the referendum. Moreover, they – like other migrants – will be aware of a public and political discourse which positions them as outsiders and as less than welcome. Incessant calls for migrants to learn and speak English, associated with ever-more challenging language requirements for citizenship and naturalisation, are part of this discourse, as is the virulent xenophobic rhetoric evident in public and political spheres around the time of the Brexit vote. Languages however should not be thought of as tools of social exclusion, but as essential instruments for building intercultural understanding and social cohesion. The language or languages that are dominant in the host society into which migrants are seeking to belong, and the languages which are already part of their individual linguistic repertoire, shape their identities as active, democratic citizens. The research discussed in this paper suggests that a translingual and intercultural approach to the teaching of the language(s) of the host society would ensure that languages become instruments of inclusion that unite rather than segregate people.

Resources
The projects discussed in this paper are:
Translation and Translanguaging: Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities (AH/L007096/1), funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The project is led by Professor Angela Creese at the University of Birmingham, and involves teams in Birmingham, Leeds, Cardiff and London. See https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tlang/index.aspx

The Diasporic Adult Language Socialisation study, funded by the Leverhulme Trust. The project is led by Professor Ben Rampton and Dr Lavanya Sankaram at King's College, London. The teacher-researchers on the associated ESOL project were Dermot Bryers, Becky Winstanley and Melanie Cooke. For more information contact: melanie.cooke@kcl.ac.uk

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Bionotes

James Simpson, a co-investigator on the TLang project, is a Senior Lecturer in Language Education at the School of Education, University of Leeds, UK, where until recently he led the Language Education academic group. As well as his work on TLang his research interests are the teaching and learning of English for multilingual students in migration contexts, and language learning with new technology in the developing world. He is the co-author of *ESOL: A Critical Guide* (OUP, 2008, with Melanie Cooke), the editor of *The Routledge Handbook of Applied Linguistics* (2011), and the co-editor of *Adult Language Education and Migration: Challenging Agendas in Policy and Practice* (Routledge, 2015, with Anne Whiteside).

Melanie Cooke is a Senior Teaching Fellow in ESOL and Applied Linguistics in the School of Education, Communication and Society at King's College, London. Apart from DALS her recent work includes doctoral research on the teaching of citizenship to ESOL students, a series of collaborative participatory ESOL projects (available at http://www.efalondon.org/what-we-do/research-and-media) and Queering ESOL, a seminar series about the cultural politics of LGBT issues in the ESOL classroom with colleagues from the University of Leeds and UCL.