

# Biliteracy and Multiliteracies



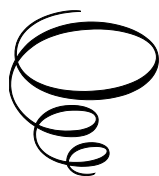
# Biliteracy and Multiliteracies:

*Building Paths to the Future*

Edited by

Fotini Anastassiou

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Biliteracy and Multiliteracies: Building Paths to the Future

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# INTRODUCTION

FOTINI ANASTASSIOU

The main purpose of this book is to introduce readers to ongoing research on the study of biliteracy, and to highlight recent trends in the promotion of biliteracy and multiliteracies in education. Literacy issues have come under the microscope of researchers in the recent decades (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kalantzis, Cope, Stellakis, & Arvaniti, 2019). The very concept of literacy includes skills such as understanding, interpreting, and managing different text types in different sociocultural environments. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that the pioneers in the study of literacy characterize it as one multidimensional concept with social and cultural components (Lee McCay, 2009; Perez, 1998) or go even further by talking about pluriliteracies/multiliteracies, which emerge through the complex linguistic and value practices adopted by speakers of multilingual societies in the 21st century (Garcia et al., 2007; Perez, 1998b).

The concept of multiliteracies implies a variety of forms related to information technology and multimedia and the variety of text formats produced within a multilingual and multicultural society. The term was coined in September 1994 by a group of ten scientists from around the world who met in New London, New Hampshire, Australia, to discuss the future of teaching literacy. This group was renamed the New London Group. With the term they invented, they wanted to describe two arguments related to the new cultural and social reality: the one concerns the growing importance of cultural and linguistic diversity, as a consequence of migration and globally commodified services, and the other concerns the multiplicity of communication channels and the effect of new technologies, due to the expansion of the media, multimedia, and the Internet (New London Group, 1996). These two arguments are related, as the rapid spread of communication channels and media enhances and expands cultural and subcultural diversity (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). For this reason, learning about the pedagogy of multiliteracies is a multimodal process, in which the individual reshapes oneself.

Besides, the concept of multiliteracies, as set by Cope, Kalantzis, Stellas, and Arvanitis (2019: 13) refers to two essential aspects of the creation of meaning nowadays: social diversity and multimodality. The first aspect highlights how texts can vary widely

depending on the social context – depending on the individual’s experiences, subject, academic, employment, specialization, cultural environment or gender identity. These differences are becoming more and more crucial in terms of the ways we interact in everyday life, how we create and participate in meanings. (In Anastassiou, this volume)

Cope and Kalantzis (2000: 12–13), being founding members of the New London Group, emphasized that in the new conditions that we live in the ability to adapt to constant change, critique and empowerment, and innovation and creativity, and the ability to learn how to learn are essential skills. It is within this context that they introduced the concept of “productive diversity”, thus making “what used to be considered a problem – the diversity of cultures, languages, experiences, ways of thinking and creating meaning – an important skill”. They also seem to associate the term “diversity” not only with linguistically different students, but mainly with the multiple paths of literacy, the different learning environments, and even the different means that can be adapted to facilitate the creation of meaning and the response to different pedagogical orientations and educational needs.

Fishman (in Garcia et al. 2007), as one of the first researchers of biliteracy, as early as 1980 had defined it as the “excellent knowledge of reading and writing in two languages”. Dworin (2003: 171) pointed out that “biliteracy is a term used to describe children’s literacy skills in two languages, to any degree, that develops either simultaneously or sequentially”. Reyes (2006: 269), having as a starting point the above definitions, suggested the use of the term “emergent biliteracy”, to refer to the “ongoing, dynamic development of concepts and excellent ability to think, listen, read and write in two languages”. Besides, she stated that seen from a sociocultural point of view the term also embraces the use of linguistic and cultural experiences by the children themselves so that they can co-build the meaning with their parents, siblings, teachers, and peers of their environment. Biliteracy is also defined as “all cases in which communication occurs in two (or more) languages in and around writing” (Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000: 98). Hornberger (2004) adopts the approach of language as a social resource rather than as a problem. In fact, with her theoretical model on the “continua of biliteracy” Hornberger suggested that the issues of bilingualism and biliteracy may be seen through one wider grid of



intersecting frames, thus hoping to achieve an ecological view of the phenomenon (for a more detailed analysis on biliteracy see Anastassiou, this volume). Kenner and Kress (2003) supported the view that children who are exposed to bilingual experiences have a wider range of “semiotic” sources, as well as the flexibility to alternate or combine them, which can function as a remarkable advantage in the new global context where communication emerges within a complex web of languages and cultures.

The collection of contributions in the present volume will give the reader a general idea of where research is heading in the areas of biliteracy and multiliteracies, especially in view of multilingualism and its ever-changing conditions. The authors situate their research within current debates in terms of theory and empirical data. In the present volume readers will find several chapters discussing issues of biliteracy and multiliteracies in a wide variety of settings, countries, and orientations, coming from Greece, Cyprus, Brazil, Malta, Iceland, Portugal, and the USA.

Fotini Anastassiou reviews the concepts of biliteracy, multiliteracies, and translanguaging in education, and attempts an overview of the current theories and research in the field. The chapter presents the way in which biliteracy has been seen in education and how it can be used by teachers in the future to help their students better achieve school success. Also, studies on emergent biliteracy are presented given that they have contributed to a better understanding of biliteracy in general. Further, the scope of multiliteracies, as set out by the New London Group (1996) and Cope, Kalantzis, Stellakis, and Arvanitis (2019), is discussed with reference to two essential aspects of the creation of meaning nowadays, social diversity and multimodality, as well as the concept of critical literacy. Through critical literacy, students acquire the tools to recognize, and sometimes resist, socially constructed notions of identity that are inherently involved in “reading” speech and the world, while having their own racial, linguistic, and sociocultural expression of reading from the world. The chapter also goes through the various theories around the concept of translanguaging and how it can be implemented in education. Translanguaging has proven to be an effective pedagogical practice in a variety of educational contexts, where the school language or the language of instruction is different from the languages of the students. By deliberately splitting the artificial and ideological differences between indigenous versus immigrant languages, majority versus minority languages, and target language versus students’ mother tongues, translanguaging empowers both the learner and the teacher, transforms power relations, and focuses the teaching and learning process on making

sense for the students, helping to improve the overall teaching experience, and developing students' identities.

Sally Brown has examined three young emergent bilinguals (ages 6–7) in a public-school classroom and the ways in which they showed their knowledge of read-alouds through oral language, written language, drawings, and gestures. Data was gathered from videotaped small group interactions, interviews, and digital drawing samples in response to the read-alouds. Taken together these multimodal forms (including translanguaging) indicated much progress in their literacy development that went unrecognized by school tests. Over the course of an academic year, the case study students developed literate identities, used one mode to build upon another to offer a complex insight into books, and developed innovative ways to use digital tools for communicative purposes. This chapter will offer readers ways of seeing the strengths of emergent bilingual students. Recommendations will also be provided to help school systems and teachers see beyond test scores and to value multimodal learning.

Sviatlana Karpava investigates the heritage language education of Russian-speaking families in Cyprus and how it affects heritage language (HL) use, maintenance, and transmission. Eighty families were under investigation: 40 mixed-marriage (Russian wife and Greek Cypriot husband) and 40 Russian-speaking (both spouses Russian) immigrant families residing in Cyprus. The results of the study showed that Russian-speaking parents in immigrant contexts realized the importance of early child literacy experiences at home and tried to enhance these experiences both in Russian and in the target language of the country via (in)direct teaching and meaning-focused shared activities.

Hanna Ragnarsdóttir's qualitative research project aimed at critically exploring the language policies and literacy practices of diverse immigrant families in Iceland and how these impacted their children's education and the relationships between these families and their teachers. The theoretical framework included writings on family language policy and linguistically and culturally appropriate educational practices. Findings indicated that the parents actively contributed to the educational practices in the schools, building on their language policies and literacy practices. Furthermore, the teachers, supported by their principals, developed various linguistically and culturally appropriate practices in cooperation with the parents and built on resources that the children and families bring to the schools. This active cooperation between families and schools in relation to language

learning provides a firm basis for the children's multilingual development. However, challenges included the lack of training for all teachers to ensure the sustainability of such good practices.

Bruna Ruano and Silvia Melo-Pfeifer deal with refugee students' perceptions of academic culture and literacy and with their awareness of commonalities and differences between home countries and Brazilian academic life and learning traditions. Preliminary results point towards the intersection of several aspects hindering students' better achievement in higher education: difficulties in understanding patterns of (on-line) communication between students and teachers; difficulties in producing in a second language; difficulties in fulfilling criteria for specific academic genres; different expectations and patterns of assessment; and difficulties related to symbolic violence and daily-based racism. From this perspective, they claim that having academic literacy is perceived differently across time and spaces, is dependent upon linguistic skills in the mother and the target languages, and is socially constructed and legitimated through authoritative discourses and practices.

Maria de Lurdes Gonçalves focuses on the practices of Portuguese heritage language teachers in Switzerland and Luxembourg during the period of the schools' closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which suddenly stopped the regular teaching work. Teaching plans and strategies had to be adjusted and adapted, to keep working and nurturing learning. Based on the analysis of the weekly planning and of the final individual teachers' inquiry, this chapter aims to identify the different practices used to maintain contact with the students and strategies to feed their motivation. The results will further be explored to give an insight into future practices of HL teaching and also as a basis to think about how to support these teachers in enhancing and exploring their new practices.

Kalpna Mukunda Iyengar and Howard Smith discuss a literacy experience designed to address the cultural needs of diasporic Asian Indian American (AIA) children. Under the guise of the Writing Workshop, school-aged children between the ages of six and sixteen were invited to explore their lived experiences as bicultural individuals in writing. It was demonstrated that culturally-embedded writing experiences could contribute to the literacy development and cultural preservation of diasporic learners. The literacy skills of the children were on a par with those of children of a similar age and socio-economic-status, thus negating concerns about culturally sustaining pedagogies as flawed or inherently weak in instruction.

Damian Spiteri analyses how competence in multiliteracies has developed in a vocational college in Malta, and draws attention to the wider social and educational context in which this development has taken place. Malta is essentially a bilingual and multilingual society, and this linguistic feature also merits consideration since it influences how multiliteracies are promoted and developed, particularly in Malta's diversified linguistic context. In this chapter, the student's perspective of multiliteracies is presented and it is observed that they believe that the key factor that enables them to feel adept in the development of multiliteracies is their ability to communicate, to feel a part of a community, and to have the social acumen and know-how to make friends with others. This process is regularly reinforced when they are constantly called upon to develop new ways of working, learning, and using information technology and other resources to get their message across to others in educational and other social contexts.

Maria Carolina Lúgaro, Maria Helena Araújo e Sá and Ana Isabel Silva discuss, under the topic of "Literacy in Bi/ multilingualism and bi/ multilingual education", the concepts and theories that arise from studies about the development of multiliteracies of deaf students, from the multidisciplinary fields of language studies, deaf studies and educational sciences. Based on a sociocultural and dialogic teaching approach, they bring a perspective that values the language skills of the deaf and goes beyond, towards a plurilingual turn in deaf education as an emancipatory path that allows them to exercise full and active citizenship. They also discuss the intercomprehension approach, one that aims at a holistic communication competence in which the encounter between languages becomes a space of learning through the activation of strategies, previous knowledge, and repertoires to understand new texts in languages never studied. Regarding the reception of written texts, the authors analyse that intercomprehension may promote the use of linguistic, metalinguistic, and strategic skills, increase language awareness and develop the multiliteracies of deaf students.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# BILITERACY, MULTILITERACIES AND TRANSLANGUAGING IN EDUCATION: REVIEWING CURRENT TRENDS AND THEORIES

FOTINI ANASTASSIOU

### 1. Introduction

Literacy is a broad term and it does not simply refer to the ability to read and write. “The concept of ‘literacy’ refers to the ability of the individual to function effectively in various environments and communication situations, using written and spoken texts, as well as non-linguistic texts (e.g. pictures, blueprints, maps, etc.)” (Mitsikopoulou, 2001). The development of some degree of literacy naturally takes place in our family and social environment, as we learn our mother tongue and manage to communicate with different people in different social situations through different types of speech and types of text. At the same time, however, some type of systematic training is necessary. Education is considered to be a factor in the identification of the advantages that multilingual students may have compared to bilinguals. However, it cannot be considered the most decisive factor for language proficiency. Literacy in bilingualism can appear in both languages and is in that case referred to as biliteracy. Biliteracy is defined as “all cases in which communication occurs in two (or more) languages in and around writing” (Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000: 98). Bialystok (2001) reports that children who learn to read and write in two languages, but also more generally develop literacy in both languages, create complex links between their language systems, and therefore have better control of both languages in comparison to those having these skills in only one language.

In Greece research has very recently begun to include the literacy factor in studies with bilingual children, which is why it is a field of research that

does not yet have much data. This may have been because the majority of surveys until recently had Albanian children as participants and it appeared that their families were not typically promoting literacy in their heritage language. Gogonas (2009) reported that it was rare for families to promote their children's literacy in Albanian. This was related to the parents' desire that their children would integrate into Greek society. In this regard, Gogonas in the same study states that several children deliberately did not show knowledge of the Albanian language, not even at the oral level, as they wanted to show that they were not related to a community they considered to have lower social status than that of the Greek one.

Moreover, Anastassiou (2014) stated that most of the participants in her research were educated only in Greek and not in their language of inheritance, Albanian. According to Andreou (2012), the school in Greece, as in most countries, does not assess the language skills of students, but mainly their ability to use the official language of the school, which is not the same thing. Therefore, children who speak a language other than the official school language at home, or even a dialect of the official language, are usually extremely insecure when they start school and quickly adopt the usage of only the official language because they feel that this way they are better accepted in the school environment. This trend is observed especially in children from immigrant families, who have been associated with a lower social status in Greece. In contrast, students from Central European countries often attend private schools where the curriculum includes teaching in their heritage language. In these cases, students are taught literacy from a very early age in both languages (e.g. French and Greek). With different skills and knowledge, these students have mastered or are gradually mastering Greek as a second language and this fact plays an important role in their ability to participate in their host society, and in the degree of the appearance of their heritage language in their daily communications. After all, the language of our parents is the language associated with our own identity (Anastassiou, 2019; Anastassiou, 2020; Gogonas, 2007, 2009; Chatzidaki, 2000). The objectives of "identification texts", which aim, among other things, to create conditions for the strengthening of the identities of children in multilingual environments (Cummins & Early, 2011), are particularly useful for the development of grammar and are suggested in the teaching of young students from immigrant backgrounds.

Empirical research has shown that bilingual children exhibit some advantages in early literacy skills in both languages. More specifically,



bilingual children seem to have a stronger general understanding of literacy and writing systems, especially when the two languages have similar writing systems. Besides, when two languages have similar writing systems, children's strategies and skills in one language, such as decoding and phonological awareness, are transferred to the other language. Thus, literacy skills in one language are enhanced by literacy skills in the other (Bialystok et al., 2005). Also, very young children who are more proficient in both languages show stronger phonological awareness skills, especially for phonemic awareness tasks such as phonemic segmentation (Verhoeven, 2007). Therefore, the strengthening of both languages benefits bilingual children in the acquisition of early literacy skills, especially when both languages have similar writing systems.

Thomas (1992) emphasizes the importance of formal language learning, that is, that which takes place in a school environment, as she argues that those bilinguals who possessed grammatical knowledge in both languages performed better in tests that required a very good knowledge of the language. Also, Hawkins (1999) referred to language learning in a school environment as a language collaboration consisting of two aspects: a) learning how to learn a language and b) interlinguistic comparisons, with a particular emphasis on the first language in the process of acquiring a second language.

## **2. Biliteracy**

Biliteracy is defined as “all cases in which communication occurs in two (or more) languages in and around writing” (Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000: 98). An important contribution to the conceptualization of biliteracy is the creation of a general framework, which can be used in different environments. The Continuum of Biliteracy is a framework that can be used as a template for the analysis of teaching, research, and language design in multilingual environments. The framework has been described in detail and applied to many different educational situations (Hornberger, 2003). There are four dimensions – environments, development, content, and media – which are considered part of the Continuum. As Hornberger explains, “The Continuum of Biliteracy model argues that the content the students and users read and write in a biliteracy environment, is as important as how (development), where (framework) or when and by what means they do it” (Hornberger, 2013: 160). Each continuum consists of weaker and stronger extremes and it is recognized that all modes of expression and types of knowledge are considered equally powerful by

society. However, this model shows that the more the learning framework allows students to draw from the whole set of each continuum, the greater the chances of a full development of biliteracy are (Colomer & Chang-Bacon, 2020).

“The development of biliteracy in individuals occurs along the continuum, according to the requirements of the general context in which they are found” (Hornberger, 2013b: 157). This dimension is represented by three scales, which can affect a person’s communication skills. The first scale represents information retrieval and production. As suggested by Hornberger (1989), it seems vital for the education of all students and especially for students who have recently immigrated to the host country, that they not only have access to information but also that they have opportunities for “comprehensible speech production”. Speaking and listening help to negotiate meaning in interaction, but the second scale represents a continuum from spoken to written language, which can also include a wider range of ways that “extend literacy beyond reading and writing” in other areas, such as the visual, audio, spatial, and behavioral (Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester 2000: 107). Thus, the information can be made available to students in multimodal designs or even in the design of multiliteracies (Cazden et al. 1996; Canagarajah, 2013). To develop communication skills, students should also produce speech appropriate to the occasion. The third scale concerns the relationship between a person’s first language and a second language. Although the entire language repertoire of the individual is valued more within the educational context (Blackledge & Creese 2010; Garcia & Wei 2014), this scale draws attention to the historical prestige of the second language in the context of minority language learning by minority language users. The interconnection of this model becomes clear when we look at the scales together. As Hornberger (1989: 281) states, “development within a continuum is based on characteristics from the whole scale of the continuum”.

### **3. Emerging biliteracy in preschool and primary school years**

Studies on emerging biliteracy in primary education have also contributed to the theoretical understanding of the early development of biliteracy. Many studies in preschool students examine the evolution of grammar at home, in their community, and in their school environment. For example, Reyes and Asuara (2008) investigated emerging biliteracy in Mexican

preschoolers with an immigrant background growing up in bilingual communities in Arizona. They observed the children mainly in their home environment and their findings showed that young children had already learnt the differences in the correspondence of sounds and letters between the two languages and knew the basic differences in writing in their two languages, such as the use of tone to mark the pronunciation in Spanish. This study also showed that an important function of biliteracy between children and their parents was the use of Spanish to translate printed material into English when there was a discussion in the family environment.

These findings are also supported by a study by Kenner et al. (2004), whose results showed that young children, exposed to more than one writing system, can distinguish between different writings at a young age. They are also supported by a study by Schwarzer (2001), which took into account the acquisition of three language codes by primary school students with a variety of writing systems at home and attending a school with a bilingual program. The findings are also supported by a study by Li (2006), which looked at how children of Chinese-Canadian descent are exposed to three languages and who may eventually develop trilateracy.

An interesting conclusion is that children can develop grammar even without formal education, a skill that Reyes (2012) calls “spontaneous grammar”. In two cases of young bilingual students, Reyes describes a teacher who uses a variety of teaching techniques to help students develop grammar early in childhood, without typical bilingual teaching. For example, the teacher encourages students to listen to a lesson in one language and then asks them to try to write about what they heard in their Lx. Research on young students provides interesting information about biliteracy because early childhood students usually think without typical restrictions on coding or translation, compared to older students or adults, and thus use multiple languages in quite flexible, creative, and innovative ways.

#### **4. Translanguaging, biliteracy, and bilingual education**

Much of the work in progress is exploring the concept of translanguaging. The term translanguaging has been used mainly by researchers in the multilingual European context and is a broad term, encompassing many aspects of multilingual and multi-dialectal language use, including grammar, coding, translation, and the overall processes by which bilinguals and

multilingual individuals can use multiple languages flexibly in a single system (Schwinge, 2017).

Translanguaging was not originally intended as a theoretical concept, but as a descriptive label for a particular linguistic practice. It was Baker's (2001) English translation of Williams's Welsh term "trawsieithu" (1994) to describe the pedagogical practices he observed in Welsh empowerment curricula, where the teacher tried to teach in Welsh and students responded largely in English. Sometimes the choice of language was reversed when students read something in Welsh and the teacher offered explanations in English. Such practices were by no means uncommon in the educational and social context of Wales. However, instead of looking at them negatively, as had been the case until then with several teachers in bilingual classrooms, Williams suggested that these practices could help maximize the learner and teacher language resources as well as the problem-solving process and knowledge construction. Over the years, translanguaging has proven to be an effective pedagogical practice in a variety of educational contexts, where the school language or the language of instruction is different from the languages of the students. By deliberately splitting the artificial and ideological differences between indigenous versus immigrant languages, majority versus minority languages, and target language versus students' mother tongues, translanguaging empowers both the learner and the teacher, transforms power relations, and focuses the teaching and learning process on making sense for the students, helping to improve the overall teaching experience, and developing their identities (García, 2009; Creese & Blackledge, 2015).

The idea of translanguaging of Williams and Baker differs in that it is not designed to be described and analyzed as an object or linguistic structural phenomenon, but as a practice and a process. It is a practice that involves the dynamic and functionally integrated use of different languages and linguistic varieties, but most importantly, it is a process of constructing knowledge that transcends languages and ultimately directs beyond the linguistics of systems and speakers to the linguistics of participation (Wei, 2018).

Thus, researchers in the field of multilingualism do not see the fluidity in multilinguals' languages as evidence of a language deficit, but as a resource that multilinguals can use deliberately, and this demonstrates multilingual skills and promotes the strengthening of their multicultural identity. According to García and Wei (2014), there is a "third space" for bilingual students and multilingual students, where phenomena such as

code exchange are treated as informal tools that can help in language mastering and the learning of literacy. Thus, pre-existing knowledge of other languages or dialects is and should be treated as an asset that with the appropriate pedagogical methods and tools can bring the best results, as translanguaging can bring to the surface different historical, social, and cultural values, the ideological investment of the various linguistic signs, and their ability to codify and recall different ways of constructing meaning depending on the communities that use them.

One of the issues that scholars deal with in the field of linguistics is its role in achieving biliteracy and multiliteracy. Research in this area often focuses on the simultaneous use of multiple languages and literacy in classrooms as well as in extracurricular settings. García and Sylvan (2011) studied the alternation of languages in international high schools in New York. In these schools, teachers taught students from a variety of language backgrounds with varying levels of English proficiency, using a “project method” curriculum tailored to the language usage practices in the classroom and the content for each student. For example, teachers in international high schools used activity guides that provided step-by-step directions for each task. Although the guides were in English, some of them also had pictures and graphic illustrations with limited use of English so that emerging bilingual students could understand the content of the activity. Also, students who speak the same heritage language or dialect were encouraged to sit at the same desk or close to each other, so that they could use these language resources and understand the educational material together.

In a different learning environment, Hornberger and Link (2012) described how college students are trained as prospective teachers at Limpopo University in South Africa and encouraged to switch language codes freely, moving between Sepedi languages, local languages, and South African English to better understand their textbooks on children’s development and to participate in research projects in their field. These examples of translanguaging demonstrate that they can be an approach to communication in multilingual classrooms and show that linguistics can overcome any barriers to our communication in developing complementary language skills.

Although recent research provides evidence for the development of bilingual education programs that would help students acquire grammar, there is still significant difficulty in effectively implementing bilingual education. While some of these difficulties are related to issues of

pedagogy or lack of resources, many of the problems in the implementation of bilingual education are related to unequal power relations in schools, communities, and universities. A major difficulty is that many teachers are not bilingual in the languages of their students. Thus, one area that needs more research is how monolingual teachers can successfully promote biliteracy. Skilton-Sylvester (2003) describes the beliefs and teaching practices of four teachers who taught Khmer students and showed variations in the extent to which they encouraged their students to use their heritage language in the classroom as well as in their willingness to include elements of Khmer culture in their classroom instructions. This research shows that the beliefs that teachers strongly hold about language acquisition and cultural identity influence their teaching practices. Studies such as those that look at the possibilities of preventing language shifting and encouraging grammar should be done in a large number of language environments, especially when many students speak lesser-known languages and may not be able to attend easily the existing bilingual programs in the school.

Another difficulty is ensuring that the teaching of biliteracy is culturally appropriate when many teachers do not share the same cultural background with their students. One suggestion for solving this problem is to use bilingual teaching assistants so that the classroom teacher can adapt bilingual teaching to the classroom such that it is more in line with the cultural knowledge that is familiar to students and members of their community. An example is a classroom program in North West England on how bilingual teaching assistants studied their knowledge of students' languages and cultures to design and conduct a variety of culturally appropriate literacy activities (Martin-Jones and Saxena, 2003). Moreover, in describing the importance of using interchangeable codes, and non-verbal and multisemiotic elements, this work shows how a variety of culturally appropriate activities, such as cooking through local recipes and telling Chinese New Year stories, can be used to teach students academic knowledge and biliteracy skills.

While much of the research on biliteracy focuses on preschoolers and elementary school students, it addresses the difficulty of how biliteracy can be developed, and of how the school success in high school of those students who are in danger of not completing their high school studies can be ensured. Although kindergarten and elementary school students have a more limited range of literacy skills and need more time to acquire literacy before entering post-secondary and tertiary education or the workforce, there are different emerging bilingual populations in high school often

labeled by teachers and school principals as “deficient” in language and literacy skills. This has a big impact on the whole school experience for older emerging bilinguals. Menken (2013) describes research into the teaching of biliteracy to emerging bilingual students in secondary education. This population includes students with formal dropouts and students who have been taught English for several years. These students are faced with the need to pass many high-level exams and meet high literacy expectations, often with little educational support, while in the literature there are discussions about how high school can help emerging bilinguals achieve high rates of grammar. One problem that needs to be addressed is how to scale up the application of best practice in education for bilingual students, especially in areas with a lower incidence of emerging bilinguals, in rural areas, and in urban schools with minimal resources.

## **5. Multiliteracies and critical literacy**

As mentioned earlier, literacy includes the concept of literacy, but it is broader than that. As Hatzisavvidis (2003) describes, in terms of written language, literacy is not only the recognition of letters but also the knowledge that we read a text from top to bottom and from left to right (for western societies), that uppercase and lowercase letters are used, that in a book there is a cover, with its role, that footnotes and references are made in a certain way, that we write and understand a letter and an advertisement differently, that the main page of a website includes its contents, that in the e-mail we can use oral elements, etc. “Multiliteracies” is a term coined in 1994 by a group of well-known scientists from around the world called the New London Group, and which met in New London, New Hampshire, Australia. The term “multiliteracies” has been proposed as the most appropriate to describe, on the one hand, the growing importance of diversity in terms of languages and cultures and, on the other, the parallel and increasingly important impact of new technologies on the development of literacy in modern societies.

An indicative excerpt from the conclusions of that meeting is the following description:

Differences in language, speech, and levels of speech are indicators of the differences in the worlds of life. As the worlds of life diverge more and more and their boundaries become more and more blurred, the central reality of language becomes the multiplicity of meanings and their constant shear. Just as there are multiple layers to one’s identity, so there are

multiple reasons for identity and multiple reasons for recognition that need to be negotiated. We must have the ability to negotiate these many worlds of life – the many worlds of life in which each of us lives and we meet them in our daily lives. (Cope & Kalantzis, 1999, in Tsokolidou, 2012: 116)

In this sense, multilingualism is the variety of forms of communication that relate to information technologies and multimedia, but also the types of text found in a multilingual and multicultural society. Multiliteracies are not only based on the semiotics of the languages in question but unite various semiotic systems that play a decisive role in the production of meaning. Thus, the semiotic systems that produce a text are not a simple articulation of literacy skills (linguistic, mathematical, cultural, technological, audiovisual, etc.), but a single set of differently organized modes. Multiliteracies, as transformed by Kalantzis, Cope, Stellakis, and Arvanitis (2019: 13) refer to two very essential aspects in the creation of meaning nowadays: social diversity and multimodality. The first aspect highlights how texts can vary widely, “depending on the social context – depending on the individual’s experiences, subject, academic, employment, specialization, cultural environment or gender identity”. These differences are becoming more and more crucial in terms of the ways we interact in everyday life, in how we create and participate in meanings. Next is for students to understand the differences in the patterns of meaning synthesis and to be able to easily communicate the meanings to cope with all the demands of their lives.

The second aspect of meaning-making that the theory of multiliteracies supports is multimodality. New means of communication and information create new ways of transmitting meaning, as the written linguistic codes of meanings are connected with visual, auditory, tactile, gestural, and spatial perception patterns of meaning synthesis (Kalantzis, Cope, Stellakis, & Arvanitis (2019: 14). In light of the above, the above-mentioned authors suggest that teachers should complement traditional teaching methods, which relied heavily on older theories for the development of literacy skills and introduce multimodal forms of communication, especially those characterized by digital media. Macedo (2003) had referred to as mechanistic conceptions of literacy those that emphasize only the decoding and basic understanding of messages, without any focus on the dynamics of the power of language. In contrast, the field of critical literacy has defined that, in addition to decoding and comprehension, literacy also includes the dynamics of political and socio-historical power (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2010, 2014; Luke, 2012). These dynamics of power are of great importance for language learning (Dooley, 2009; Morgan & Ramanathan,



2005) and, therefore, must be addressed explicitly through critical approaches to bilingual education.

In particular, critical literacy approaches have long been seen as a way for students to navigate the complexities of identity (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Golden & Pandya, 2019; Lyiscott, 2017). Through critical literacy, students acquire the tools to recognize, and sometimes resist, socially constructed notions of identity that are inherently involved in “reading” speech and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987), while having their own racial, linguistic, and sociocultural expression of reading from the world. “The ideological side of literacy practices is pointed out and it is argued that like all uses of language, the forms of literacy shape and are shaped through ideological positions associated with forms of social power” (Mitsikopoulou, 2001). In this way, critical literacy can help us understand how emerging bilinguals are socialized to reveal their multiple identities, which are often hidden, and their cultures in school communities and the wider social environment, a practice that seems to be used by immigrant background students to address racialization (Colomer, 2018).

## 6. Conclusions

Literacy could not possibly be considered static, since, over time, there has been a progressive redefinition – and consequently an extension – of its content as a function in both the change of socio-cultural conditions and the understanding of these changes (Felini, 2008). Although critical literacy is often discussed as one homogeneous approach to language education it is a grid of different epistemological traditions, educational trends, and teaching principles. Critical literacy, then, is a “pedagogical philosophy” or an “educational ideal” that houses a variety of approaches with some common theoretical positions and assumptions. More specifically, literacy starts from the notion that dealing with texts, i.e. the development of literacy, not only aims at the efficient operation of the student as a future citizen in their communication needs in society (functional literacy) but also the development of his criticism of them. In this context, according to Curdt-Christensen (2010), critical literacy can be defined as the ability to read, examine, and understand a text by asking questions, that is, “speaking to the text”.

The implementation of critical literacy training programs undoubtedly involves many challenges and problems as it presupposes a different school from what we know, promoting different types of students with more active and participatory roles, in a spirit of cooperation. Respectively, it

requires different types of teachers, with criticism and willing to support student-centered forms of teaching, but also to “read” the various literate identities of their students. Therefore, critical literacy promotes another pedagogical culture for language learning, completely inconsistent with the existing school curriculum structures, which revolve around predetermined school times, by predetermined curricula, and only aiming at success in national exams.

Translanguaging practically works for bilingual or multilingual people as a “translanguaging space” or a translanguaging zone (Blackledge, Creese, & Hu, 2016), where they can express freely the different dimensions of their personal history, their beliefs, and their ideology, turning these elements into a living experience. In fact, to the extent that translanguaging is not limited to language structures, it opens up space for linguistic practices that recognize in speakers the ability to choose different language elements, which may have their origin in a “certain named language”, by utilizing their entire linguistic and cultural repertoire to communicate effectively (García, 2016; Tsokalidou, 2016). Translanguaging opens up new spaces of coexistence or otherwise social spaces, where multilinguals, their families, and their communities are allowed to combine diverse linguistic and cultural practices (García & Wei, 2014: 24–25). In that sense, a translanguaging approach to education should be oriented towards critical awareness and parallelly developing tools that will highlight the relationship between language and power, thus leading society in a transformative direction.

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