

IATEFL Edinburgh 2025

Helping teachers navigate the shift to a plurilingual ELT approach

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Our British Council Statement....

 BRITISH COUNCIL

Teaching Excellence

Statement of approach on the use of learners' (other) languages in English teaching and learning at the British Council

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Note: The terms 'learners' language(s)' or 'other language(s)' is used in this document instead of 'first language(s)', 'L1', 'own language(s)', 'native language(s)' or 'mother tongue(s)'. This is to acknowledge the diversity and complexity of linguistic backgrounds and profiles and the concept of plurilingualism (e.g. Council of Europe, 2009)



Our position on the use of other languages in British Council teaching contexts

- we do not impose an inflexible **'English-only'** policy on teachers and learners in our British Council teaching network.
- we recognise that teachers and learners might want to make **'judicious use'** of other languages to enhance learning in our English teaching and learning environments, where and when appropriate.

It is not a **'policy'** which is intended to be **prescriptive**. We recognise the diverse nature of contexts and beliefs across our British Council teaching network will be influential on **whether, how much, and how** learner languages are used in the ELT classroom

It intends to provide agency to our **teaching teams and learners** in making principled and contextually appropriate decisions for making use of other languages to enhance the English language learning experience.

Your views...



A An **'English-only'** approach is the most effective way to learn/teach the language

B Teachers can only make use of learners' other languages if they also have **proficiency** in their learners' language(s)

C Learners can only make use of other languages if they have a **shared language** with their peers

D I feel guilty if languages other than English are used in my classroom



1 Strongly agree, 2 Generally agree, 3 Generally disagree, 4 Strongly disagree

Overview



- **Languages**
 - Linguistic journeys
 - Language terms
- **Teaching beliefs**
- **Background:**
 - How did we end up excluding other languages in ELT
 - The shift to a plurilingual approach in ELT
- **Contextual factors and challenges**
- **Teaching Strategies**
- **Wrap up:** What are you taking away? Any questions?
- **Resources:** slides, reading list and resources

Languages

My linguistic journey..

	When/ How did I learn it?	What can I do in it?
English	From birth + family/ friends, education, reading..	Pretty much everything I want to!
Welsh	Primary School in Wales – 1984-89 Welsh lessons, exposure to signage, media/radio, TV	Sing songs, poems, minimal transactional conversation- greetings, numbers etc..
French	International school (IGCSE) in Seychelles 1991-93 Working in France –2001-05 need to communicate – still visiting regularly now	Good reading and listening comprehension Minimal communication in conversations (improves after time)
Spanish	Some classes, living and working in Mexico 2007-17 and Spain 2019 + noticing/ comparing to English/ French	Confidently communicate in almost all situations (receptive and productive)
Catalan	Self-access 2022+ (Duolingo – translation) comparing to Spanish, French, English. Noticing/ exposure from living in Catalunya	Transactional (planned) conversations Read most things (emails/leaflets/ books etc) Understand when in familiar contexts

Your linguistic journey?



Language	When / How did I learn it?	What can I do in it?

How many languages do you have in your 'journey'?



Language terms

Monolingual

Proficiency in one language

Bilingual

Proficiency in two languages

Multilingual

Proficiency in more than two languages

Plurilingual

Developing and using a range of languages to varying levels of proficiency to communicate
(Council of Europe)

L1/L2 first language/second language

native language mother tongue dominant language

home language own language foreign language

Learners' (Other) Languages (LOL)



- How would you describe yourself and the languages you know and use?
- As a language learner, how did you use your other language(s) to help **you learn** new ones?

Teaching Beliefs

Teaching beliefs



To what extent do you identify/agree with the following teacher comments about the use of other languages in ELT?



A. Inclusion of OL adds more cultural awareness and respect for others to lessons and increases rapport and curiosity. It empowers learners and allows them to understand that all languages are valuable, not just English.

B. Teachers should try to limit their use of OL in class because it reduces the English input learners have.

C. OL use can facilitate the learning of complex language, prevent frustration, engage struggling learners and create a positive learning atmosphere

D. It creates a laziness amongst students who can just ask the teacher what a word is in their language instead of actively thinking about the context.

E. Trying to totally exclude learners' OL is unrealistic- being able to come to class being themselves is important, they speak another language and that is undeniable, we cannot pretend it's not there.

F. Comparing and contrasting differences and similarities with English aids recognition and retention of key language features and develops general linguistic awareness

G. Sticking to English can build student's confidence. They are pushed to develop survival skills such as paraphrasing or explaining meaning in different ways if they can't use OL.

Your beliefs and influences



- How would you **sum-up** your own beliefs about using other languages in ELT?
- What **has influenced** your views/beliefs towards using other languages in English teaching and learning? (*e.g own experience, observing learners, qualifications, reading ..*)



Bit of background

How did we end up
excluding other languages
in ELT?

Bit o' background – 19th -20th centuries

Aspire to achieving native level proficiency in **UK/US standards** of English

Mass migration expectation to assimilate/ linguistic capital

Reform Movement (1890's +) proposing alternatives- 'native' pronunciation (IPA)

Berlitz (1852-1921) Advocate for monolingual learning with no OL use

'Native' teachers with more legitimacy to teach

Colonialism and Globalisation of English (British Empire)

Influential voices

Krashen (1941-) Immersion, OL use as detrimental to proficiency

Private language schools take off (promotion) (1900+)

Multilingual classes LOL use seen as an option

Makare report (1961) Commonwealth TESOL conference in West Africa

Assumptions

Makarere report (1961)
Commonwealth TESOL
conference in West Africa
Five tenets for TESOL

- The **monolingual** ‘*assumption*’ – English is best taught monolingually
- The **subtractive** ‘*assumption*’ – If other languages are used, English standards will drop
- The **native speaker** ‘*assumption*’ – The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker.
- The **early start** ‘*assumption*’ – The earlier English is taught, the better the results.
- The **maximum exposure** ‘*assumption*’ – The more English is taught, the better the results.

(Phillipson, 1992, p185)- called these **fallacies** in his book

Supporting assumption:

Languages should be studied in **isolation** as **they are/ should be stored separately in the brain**

Bit of background

A shift to a plurilingual approach...

A shift..

The **monolingual** 'assumption'
Languages are **stored separately in the brain**

Challenges from the field

*“Evidence from research and practice is presented which suggests that the **rationale** used to justify **English only** in the classroom is **neither conclusive nor pedagogically sound.**” (Auerbach, 1993:9)*

Cummins (1979)
'Linguistic
Interdependence
hypothesis'

*“Research evidence provides **minimal support for these assumptions**, and they are also **inconsistent** with the instructional implications of current theory in the areas of cognitive psychology and applied linguistics”.*
(Cummins, 2007:221)

**Council of Europe
(2001 onwards)**
Plurilingual
competence

*‘the plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that ...{an individual} does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments but rather builds up a **communicative competence** to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which **languages interrelate and interact.**’ (CEFR 2001 Section 1.3)*

A shift...

The **subtractive** 'assumption'

**Insights from outside
the field**
(Bilingual education)

*"Translanguaging is the act performed by bilinguals of **accessing different linguistic features** or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to **maximize communicative potential.**"* (Ofelia García, 2009: 140)

**Haugen
(1950's)**
'code-switch'
moving
between
languages

**Grosjean
(1982)**
Bilinguals are
not two
monolinguals
in one

**(1980's Wales)
Williams, (1994)**
'Trawsieithu'
Alternating of input/
output in a lesson to
develop skills and
knowledge in both
languages

Baker (2001)
Translated into
English as
'*translanguaging*'

**Ofelia Garcia
(2009)**
Influential in
popularising
term (US)

Many things to many people!.. an **umbrella term** for the ways in which individuals use their language resources to achieve their communicative purposes **in and out of the classroom**

A shift...

The **subtractive** ‘assumption’

Approaches and methodologies

A plurilingual approach “..allows for **maximum exposure** to the target language and for work on communicative and academic skills in English, but at the same time **plurilingual teaching practices** draw on learners’ metalinguistic awareness and experiences as plurilingual speakers so as **to learn English in a more efficient way**” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013:596)

Pedagogical translanguaging “...planned by the teacher inside the classroom and can refer to the use of different languages for input and output or to other **planned strategies based on the use of students’ resources from the whole linguistic repertoire**” (Cenoz, 2017: 194).

Linguistically responsive pedagogy {is} “an approach ..where both **teachers and students value languages, language learning and linguistic diversity**, are aware of the role that language plays in academic success, and **feel comfortable using different languages**” (European Educational Research Association, 2024)
(see also Cummins, 2001, 2022; Duarte, 2019)

A shift...

The **native speaker** 'assumption'

English as a global
language for
communication

*"It is no longer seen as simply to achieve "mastery" of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the "ideal native speaker" as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim is to develop a linguistic repertory, in which **all linguistic abilities have a place**"*

(CEFR, 2001 Section 1.3)

The native-speaker of English can provide native-speaker modelling in class. But **since a native-speaker accent is not our goal**, this advantage is of limited value *(Walker, 2001)*

Global agenda for
decolonisation of
ELT

*"recent literature shows much English language teaching is still based on **colonial understandings of what English is, who should teach it, how they should teach it and what learners should learn**"*

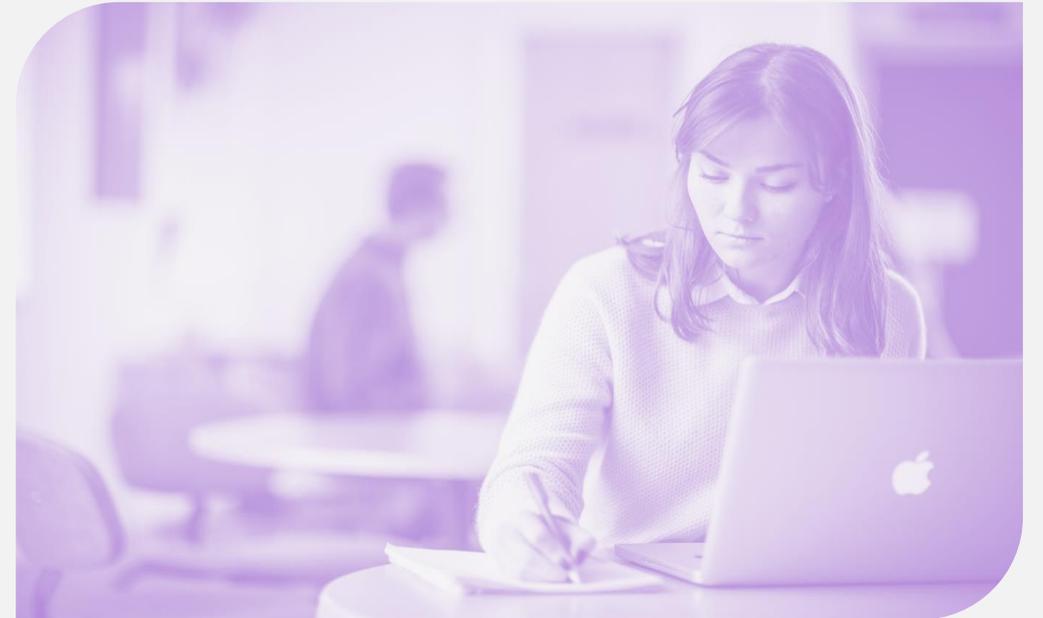
(JUICE, 2021)

Reflection checkpoint



One thing I learnt was...

I want to find out more about.....



Teaching contexts and challenges

Contextual factors / challenges



What factors might influence decisions on **if, when and how** to make use of OL?



Teachers

- Beliefs / preferences
- Proficiency in language of learners
- Knowledge
- Skills
- Experience



Learners (parents)

- Preferences/expectations
- Age / life-stage
- English proficiency level
- Shared languages
- Linguistic background
- Metacognitive abilities



School/ Classroom

- Policies / Marketing
- Class linguistic profile (mono/multilingual)
- Timing (class length)
- Materials / Methodology
- Activity type/ purpose



Make notes to describe **your** contextual factors and possible challenges

Teaching strategies

Teaching strategies

Including, not excluding, learners' languages (teachers and learners)



Acknowledging other languages

- Find out what languages the learners have such as doing a survey or poster.
- They can discuss how they learned them and if/how they used different languages to learn others.
- *This can build intercultural awareness; shows learners their languages are valued and provides teachers with insight into learners' languages to inform planning.*

- Mono/multilingual contexts
- Adaptable for different ages/ levels
- Could be done in English (preferences/policies)

Homework translations

- Learners find are given something to find outside the classroom in their other language to translate into English at home using translation tools and/or parental support.
- They bring these to class to share. Learners could discuss challenges with the translations.
- *This can help develop mediation and translation skills and allow for personalised learning.*

- Mono/multilingual contexts
- Adaptable for different ages/ levels
- Output in English (beliefs/ preferences)
- Engages/ involves parents (beliefs)

Teaching strategies



Read as many strategies as you can and for each one consider the following questions:

- How might it address contextual factors/ challenges?
- To what extent are you using/ would like to use it in your context?

1. Reflecting on learning

2. Generating ideas

3. Codeswitching

4. Multilingual word lists

5. Other-language moments

6. Multilingual materials

7. Rehearse-repeat

Your views...



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D I feel **guilty** if languages other than English are used in my classroom



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Takeaways



- Which activities done in the session would you like to use with teachers in your context?
- As a result of this session. I will
- Start..
- Stop..
- Continue..





Thank you for coming

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