

## **Legitimizing linguistic hybridity and third spaces in English-medium higher education: A spotlight on the United Arab Emirates**

Plurilingualism in the highly diverse nation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the norm. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the official language but Emiratis mainly use Khaleeji dialects at home and with friends. There is diversity within Emirati linguistic repertoires, which relates partly to medium of schooling. English is the de facto lingua franca and a common medium of instruction especially in tertiary education. In addition, as almost 90 percent of the UAE's population are transnational workers from almost 200 countries, over 100 other languages are collectively spoken. Despite such linguistic diversity, top-down language policies overtly favour the two dominant languages of English and MSA which appear in a 'choreographed way' (Lee 2020) on public signage and in educational contexts as two 'pure' languages placed side-by-side or as 'two solitudes' (Cummins, 2007). However, language on the ground is considerably more complex than as planned. This presentation shares findings from two related studies conducted at a UAE English-medium education multilingual university setting (EMEMUS) which investigate language use, attitudes and 'educationscapes' (Krompák, et al., 2022) from the point of view of Emirati university students.

A case study approach was taken for the first study using mixed-method questionnaires and classroom observations with 100 Emirati students. It was revealed that although use of full linguistic repertoires is recognized as ordinary and natural, mixed attitudes towards such practice exist. While some participants viewed using full linguistic repertoires as a pragmatic tool which eases communication and enhances meaning, others held firm monolingual ideologies attached to language use in the classroom domain. The second study built upon the first by exploring educational spaces outside the classroom. This included students' interpretations of semiotic and linguistic landscapes as 'intertextual products' (Choi et al., 2019) connected to identities and levels of belonging via an ethnographic approach to linguistic landscaping. A corpus of signage (n = 482) together with students' (n = 28) interpretations of their educationscape were analyzed through nexus analysis and thematic analysis. Four key themes were revealed: The dominance of English in the educationscape, side-by-side bilingualism, bottom-up translanguaging and the importance of 'third spaces' (Bhabha, 1994) and 'sticky places' (Ahmed, 2004; Badwan & Hall, 2020).

It is argued that bottom-up linguistic hybridity in classrooms can be used as a counter-discourse to 'English only' expectations in English-medium universities. However, for such translanguaging practice to be legitimized, deficit ideologies surrounding multilingualism in education (Blackledge et al., 2014) need to be challenged amongst educators and students themselves. Equally, it is argued that along with the 'critical trans era' in classrooms, translanguaging and third spaces can be more actively promoted in EMEMUS for increased belonging and to counter monolingual ideologies. Practical suggestions are provided on ways to make educational spaces more linguistically inclusive and authentic.

## References

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