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Title: An ecological, multilingual approach to language learning with newly reunited refugee families in Scotland

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Although academic literature and Scotland's refugee integration strategy recommend multilingual, decolonising approaches, language classes for refugees in Scotland usually focus only on the target language (English) and are predominantly teacher-led. This paper argues that newly reunited refugee families can be better supported through an ecological, multilingual approach by presenting empirical data from a five-month teaching study using qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews, observations, autoethnographic fieldnotes). Using Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) and decolonising methodology, the teacher/researcher became a learner of the participants' languages to explore the shift in learner/teacher power dynamics created through mutual language learning sessions as linguistic hospitality. The findings illustrate the participants' increased feelings of confidence and empowerment in their learning. The approach complements existing community language classes.

Keywords: language ecologies, multilingualism, translanguaging, decolonising, ESOL

Introduction

In this paper we explore the language learning needs of refugee women who had recently arrived in Glasgow through the British Red Cross Family Reunion Integration Service. We begin with an overview of the policy context and the theoretical framework which combines concepts from language ecologies and translanguaging. We then explain how these concepts complement the collaborative nature of CPAR and decolonising methodology. The discussion sections introduce the pedagogical practices and how the translanguaging approach was applied before exploring the practical benefits of working in this way. We then discuss the impact of the approach and the increased feelings of symmetry, empowerment and confidence the participants reported. To conclude, we state the limitations of the study, summarise the benefits of the approach and suggest how it complements current community ESOL classes.

The research context

Scotland is recognised as one of the few refugee-receiving countries to actively invest in integration between refugees and their host communities (Scottish Government, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, & Scottish Refugee Council, 2017). Scotland's New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy (known as 'New Scots') (Scottish Government, 2018) has gained international recognition as a model of good practice and subsequently is looked to as the benchmark for research on refugee integration. The strategy is grounded in human rights and acknowledges the positive contribution that refugees make to their host communities as part of mutual, 'two- way integration' from 'day one' (Scottish Government, 2018). The term "New Scots" was chosen as part of the initial consultation by those who wished to see official use of inclusive terminology that did not come with the stigma attendant on terms such as 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker'.

The strategy recognises refugee integration as a long-term, multi-directional process, ‘involving positive change in both individuals and host communities’ (Scottish Government, 2018). When the New Scots strategy was refreshed for 2018 – 2022 a specific focus on language learning was added which recognises that language skills development is not limited solely to improving English ([redacted] 2015; Scottish Government, 2018). The strategy also stresses that refugees should have opportunities to share their languages and cultures with their host communities in positive ways (Scottish Government, 2018).

Despite the recognition of the importance of home languages within New Scots and the growing body of academic literature which highlights the benefits of multilingual learning, most ESOL classes encourage the use of only English in the classroom. This is based on the premise, now outdated in the literature, that focusing solely on the ‘target language’ is the best way to learn. Simpson (2020) describes this as the unexamined monolingual norm. Although Scotland’s ESOL classrooms are multilingual spaces, where learners naturally communicate with each other in their own languages, these code-switching practices are ‘rarely institutionally endorsed or pedagogically underpinned’ (Creese & Blackledge, 2010, p. 105). In contrast to ESOL, English as an Additional Language (EAL) provision for children in schools effectively includes home languages but for adults there is no recognised strategy for incorporating home languages into learning English to support the development of new language skills.

The lack of sufficient funding for ESOL in Scotland creates further issues as demand for classes far outstrips availability, making it difficult for integration from ‘day one’, a fundamental principle of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy, to be supported with language learning from ‘day one’ [redacted] Further Education colleges provide full time and part time ESOL courses for which there are long waiting lists and new arrivals typically wait a year or more before they are offered a place. In an effort to plug this gap, local authorities and charities provide informal community ESOL classes and educational and social activities but these are usually limited to a few hours per week making it difficult for learners to develop the language skills they urgently need to be able to function in their new communities. Women arriving through family reunion, who are the focus of this study, face particular challenges.

Family reunion and the role of the British Red Cross

The participants in this study had all recently arrived in Glasgow through the British Red Cross Family Reunion Integration Service. One in three refugees currently arrive in the UK through family reunion (British Red Cross, 2018) and the BRC note that joining family members (95% of whom are women and children) often have significantly different integration experiences due to a lack of support services on arrival. In 2018 the BRC launched the Family Reunion Integration Service to improve support for families who begin their lives in the UK in this way.

Discussions with BRC staff highlighted that women arriving through family reunion face particular difficulties including childcare responsibilities making it difficult to attend activities outside the home. At the time of writing, there are no language classes specifically for women in this situation other than mainstream ESOL classes which necessitate a certain level of confidence, in both language and environment, to find and understand class details, locate the class and participate. It takes time to build confidence with these activities in an alien context, and after prolonged trauma and displacement. At the early stages of adjusting to life in Scotland these are significant barriers which in turn pose a risk of isolation and impact on wellbeing and mental health. Research also indicates that refugee women with low levels of education benefit from learning English with their children and other women as this increases feelings of safety (British Council, 2017). This study aims to address some of these issues by working with women and their children and providing a language education intervention at the critical point of arrival and shortly afterwards.

Theoretical framework

An ecological approach was chosen due to its possibilities for closely connecting language learning with the process of integration into the physical context of the City of Glasgow. The study also sought to explore opportunities for practical application of the recommendations for multilingual approaches laid out in policy (Scottish Government, 2018) and academic literature (García & Wei, 2014; Simpson, 2020).

The study drew on two key elements of an ecological approach, namely:1) the relationship between language and environment and 2) the interaction between languages in the mind (Haugen, 1972). Van Lier (2004a) notes how language ecology is different from other theories that decontextualize language for the purposes of studying individual linguistic features or grammatical structures. An ecological theory holds that language and context are inextricably linked and cannot be separated. Without context 'there is no language left to be studied' (van Lier, 2006, p. 20). For asylum seeking and refugee learners, newly arrived in Glasgow, and with small children and care responsibilities, the context is one of considerable disorientation and loss, and needs particular care and the ecology is nascent.

In practical terms, an ecological approach intentionally connects classroom learning with the real-world and encourages a reciprocal relationship between the two (Levine, 2020) where classroom learning responds to the context (Kramsch, Levine, & Phipps, 2010). Learning also needs to be locally meaningful (Tudor, 2003) to respond to 'local realities' (Duff & van Lier, 1997).

Translanguaging

As language ecology is also based on the internal interaction between languages in the minds of bi and multilingual speakers (Haugen, 1972) it is compatible with multilingual approaches such as 'translanguaging' which refers to the everyday practices of multilinguals to 'shuttle between languages' (Canagarajah, 2011), regardless of socially or politically defined boundaries (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015). Translanguaging is also a recognised pedagogy based on the concept of 'linguistic repertoire' (García & Kleyn, 2016; García & Wei, 2014; Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012) where learners use their full linguistic resources for learning and connect new language to existing knowledge. It is understood that linguistic items are not categorised within separate internal systems but instead form a unitary system which speakers draw on selectively to communicate.

Translanguaging places learners at the centre of their own learning as it is oriented toward the speaker rather than one particular language, promoting a sense of self-worth that is not based solely on English language ability (Simpson & Cooke, 2017). Wei (2017) highlights the significance of 'languaging', the co-constructed, relational and dialogic nature of language (Wei, 2011), which is also contained within translanguaging. Such 'languaging' became particularly key to the pedagogy due to limited shared language and the need to communicate in the moment. Translanguaging fits particularly well with the collaborative nature of this research and its aim of increasing participants' feelings of confidence and empowerment as it complements recommendations within New Scots (Scottish Government,

2018) by valuing refugees' existing skills and encouraging refugees to share their own languages.

Although the benefits of translanguaging are widely acknowledged, further exploration of its practical application is needed (Canagarajah, 2011; Lewis et al., 2012) as it requires teachers to purposefully incorporate learners' home languages in a strategic way. In this research, one of the main concerns teachers raised centred on how teachers can include learners' languages that they do not know well. García and Wei (2014) suggest this should not be a barrier and note that translanguaging works well for teachers who are willing to support learners to direct their own learning. Developing a collaboratively built, translanguaging classroom (García, Johnson, Seltzer, & Valdés, 2017) requires teachers to be willing to explore the shift in power dynamics that this entails.

Social justice, linguistic dominance and decolonising multilingualism

Social justice, linguistic dominance and linguistic human rights can all be improved by recognising the importance of refugees' own languages and reducing the status of English. English holds a very powerful position within the global hierarchy of languages which Phillipson & Skutnabb- Kangas (1996) describe as a 'pecking order' within which 'English has the sharpest beak' (p.429). Although English is the dominant societal language in Scotland, and is undoubtedly needed for everyday life, Scotland is officially multilingual with many languages spoken in the local community. This language ecology could be better reflected within teaching practice without reducing the importance of learning English for integration.

[redacted] notes the need for a 'decolonising' of multilingualism and 'renewed understandings' which she describes as a 'waking up' in the West, to the fact that most of the world's speakers have a variety of language repertoires. Multilingualism is the norm rather than the exception. Putting English last, particularly in the context of working with refugees and asylum seekers, can have a powerful impact as 'decentring, decolonising, giving up power as control follow easily in contexts where we do not have linguistic control' [redacted] [redacted] This approach to decolonising multilingualism complemented the collaborative nature of the research.

Investment and Identity

Power and identity were also key to the theoretical framework as the research sought to explore the shift in dynamics created by taking a decolonising, collaborative approach. Norton's (2013) investment challenges the idea that motivation is an intrinsic character trait of the learner, unaffected by unequal teacher/learner power relations. Pedagogical practices can influence how learners perceive their opportunities to create new identities and whether these are subordinate or more powerful (Norton, 2013). Classroom practices which include refugees' home languages may help to foster the investment which Norton describes and empower learners to recognise their potential to create multilingual identities.

Methodology

Author 1 delivered the teaching study and carried out the data collection, drawing on her twenty years' experience working in English language teaching in the UK, Germany and Japan (including twelve years working with refugees in Glasgow). The study combined the key components of a multilingual, ecological approach, grounded in orientation, with collaborative, decolonising methodology to explore confidence and empowerment. Author 1 participated 'as learner'(García & Wei, 2014) of the participants' languages (Tigrinya, Tamil, Farsi and Arabic) and took a short online beginners' Arabic course prior to starting the project. The other languages were completely new to her.

Research Design

The teaching study took place in Glasgow from February-June 2019 and consisted of fourteen two-hour learning sessions which included an initial pilot (four x 2-hour learning sessions). The pilot provided an opportunity for the participants to decide if they wanted to participate in the main study and to evaluate the teaching methods/materials. The main study directly followed the pilot at the participants request not to lose momentum.

The research was framed as an iterative spiral of critical participatory action research (CPAR) which Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2014) describe as 'practice changing practice'. CPAR was chosen due to its compatibilities with the decolonising approach as it is considered a design and method of social science research and an epistemological and ethical stance on who produces knowledge and how this knowledge is produced and used (Stoudt & Torre, 2014). The approach is methodologically eclectic which complemented the emergent nature of the project, allowing for practice and critical reflection on practice.

Author 1 was engaged in the research as a teacher/facilitator and participant-observer within an interpretivist research paradigm, using qualitative methods (audio-recorded semi-structured interviews, observations, autoethnographic fieldnotes and participant feedback) to carry out the research and gather data. CPAR recognises the benefits of being directly involved in the research and rejects the idea of an external observer entering a setting to record and represent what is happening in favour of an ongoing process of researcher reflexivity.

Ethics of care

Ethical intercultural relationships were key to the project due to the circumstances through which the women had arrived in the UK. Author 1 drew on feminist care ethics (Gilligan, 1993; Noddings, 2012) which emphasise the interdependence between people and the need to establish a 'climate of care' as a foundation for teaching/learning relationships. For Author 1 this required a high level of emotional labour to ensure that participants felt sufficiently supported to take part in the project. This support included text messages between sessions, supporting learners to travel to the classes, listening carefully, working with interpreters and the BRC to ensure that there were no misunderstandings in terms of expectations or the support needed.

Yuval- Davis (2011) notes that feminist ethics of care transcends cultures and notes the need for respect and trust to be mutual, rather than one person in a more dominant position, caring for someone needy. These concepts were reflected in the co-learning relationship and the balance of power created through the decolonising approach.

Learning Sessions

The participants chose the content of the learning sessions and requested to focus on 'everyday' topics to support them with settling into life in Glasgow (using the bus, shopping, healthcare and things to do in the local area). Author 1 designed activities and materials based on these topics. Some of the learning sessions were delivered as straightforward language learning activities in the classroom. Other activities took place outside the classroom to connect with the local context, in keeping with the ecological approach, and to provide an orientation to Glasgow. These 'real world' activities included travelling on the bus together, visits to three local museums and walks in the local park. Author 1 and the participants also delivered a workshop at the University Spring School entitled ‘Bringing the Outside in’. Author 1 was careful to make these experiences as authentic as possible rather than working solely within the ‘ecological niche’ (Kramsch et al., 2010) of the classroom.

Author 1 sought to foster a translanguaging ‘stance’ (Simpson, 2020, p. 52) as a general openness ‘toward language and language difference’ (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011, p. 311) to increase the visibility of other languages by starting each session with a word or phrase on the smartboard in Tigrinya, Tamil, Farsi or Arabic and asking participants to work together in their own languages to complete tasks. Author 1 also created worksheets to support the participants to map single lexical items across languages. Author 1 relied on the participants and used online translation tools to support her with these activities. Author 1 could not always understand what was being said which reduced her power and gave participants a more active role in their learning.

These practices complemented the decolonising methodology (Ngugi wa, 1986; Phipps, 2019; Smith, 1999) by decentring power away from Author 1 and her role of researcher/teacher and reducing the position of English. Author 1 worked with the participants to foster a co-learning relationship where all knowledge is valued, and participants learn from each other (Brantmeier, cited in García and Wei, 2014).

Data Analysis

The data (fieldnotes, interview transcripts, observations, participant feedback) were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) coupled with bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) describe the role of the interpretive bricoleur as a ‘quilt maker’, who draws together different materials to create a patchwork quilt. Author 1 operated as bricoleur by piecing the data together which allowed her to apply the interpretative framework at a theoretical and methodological level and respond to the research as it emerged.

Data sources were compared using crystallisation (Richardson & St Pierre, 2018). Richardson and St Pierre (2018) describe the crystal as a useful image for validity in qualitative research as it allows researchers to understand their data from different angles, through more than one way of knowing. This was useful as much of the data were observational data, due to limited shared language. Author 1 reviewed the data, compared all sources many times and continued to delve deeper into the themes during the writing-up stage.

The Participants

Participants self-selected by letting BRC staff know they wanted to join the project. Author 1 agreed with the BRC staff that the project would work best for mothers with children of primary school age as this age group would be able to actively engage in the activities. Participants were all roughly at the same stage of learning English (beginners, all able to read and write and knew most of the Roman alphabet).

Semira

Semira is from Eritrea and speaks Tigrinya. She has a ten-year-old daughter. They were separated from Semira’s husband for 5 years before reuniting in Glasgow two weeks before the pilot. Semira attended Primary School in Eritrea for 3 years then stopped due to the war.

Rushani

Rushani is a Tamil speaker from Sri Lanka. She attends the learning sessions with her 17-year-old daughter, Lakmini. Rushani learnt English as a foreign language for a few years at school. Their family was separated for several years and reunited in Glasgow a month before the pilot.

Kamila

Kamila is from Sudan. She arrived in Glasgow two weeks before the project started. She speaks Arabic and attends learning sessions with her two sons aged 10 and 12. Kamila only attended the pilot study.

Yasmine

Yasmine is from Iran. She joined the project after the pilot. She has a five-year old daughter who also attends the sessions. Yasmine finished high school in Iran and is also studying ESOL at college. She was separated from her husband for several years. They reunited in Glasgow 5 months before the project.

Key Findings and Discussion

In the following discussion we briefly introduce the practical benefits of the ecological, multilingual approach before focusing on the impact on confidence and empowerment of working in this way.

Starting at 'day one'

Author 1 had limited information about the participants before the first day of the project. The BRC provided a list of participants' names, their languages (Arabic, Tamil, Tigrinya, Farsi), the ages of their children and their date of arrival in Glasgow. Author 1 did not know how much English they knew or how much education they had been able to access before coming to Scotland. For the first meeting, Author 1 planned to introduce the research and break the ice through a few introductory activities to illustrate the nature of the sessions in the hope of fostering the participants' 'investment' (Norton, 2013). Author 1 wanted the project to be as collaborative as possible and to give participants a shared sense of ownership from the start. This meant Author 1 could not plan the sessions before she met the participants and identified what they wanted to learn, their level of English, their languages, the ages of their children and their interests. Planning the sessions in advance would have conflicted with the participatory nature of the project and undermined the decolonising methodology and the principles of translanguaging.

On the first day, Author 1 met the participants at the BRC offices in central Glasgow to accompany them to the University and show them which bus to use. She walked into the waiting room at the BRC to find three women and four children waiting for her. No-one knew more than a few English words and she immediately needed to try to communicate in her limited Arabic, Tigrinya and Tamil.

Author 1 was struck by how shy and unsure the participants seemed, particularly Semira who sat in the corner of the room alone, not making eye contact with anyone. When Author 1 smiled at her and checked her name, she nodded but quickly looked away and Author 1 wondered if she really wanted to come to the sessions at all. Author 1 quickly realised that outside each family group the participants did not share a language which limited their interaction with each other. It was clear from this first meeting that the participants would need high levels of support as even basic greetings and introductions in English were new. As they travelled to the University, Author 1 began to mentally adjust the activities for the first session now she knew the makeup of the group.

The first session focused on the practicalities of getting to the University, introducing participants to bus numbers, the location of the bus stops and how to use the bus tokens provided by the BRC. It situated the learning within the context of Glasgow and integration from ‘day one’. Author 1 could see that none of the participants had any of the English or local knowledge to be able to travel independently at this stage.

Deciding the content of the learning sessions

The participants chose to focus the project on the ‘everyday’ language needed for taking the bus, buying tickets, food, general communication, greetings and numbers. At the end of the first session, Author 1 was able to put their request for practical support into direct action by leaving the room together and going outside to wait at the bus stop in the dark to show them the bus timetable and bus number. Author 1 gave out the bus tokens and waited in the cold with them whilst checking each new English word back to each of their languages. Author 1 took a photo of the bus number and timetable to use in the next session. When the bus came, Author 1 got on the bus with them, showed them where to put the token, thanked them for coming, stepped off the bus and waved them goodbye.

There is solidarity in this immediate action of being physically next to each other rather than explaining how to use the bus at a distance, in the classroom. Author 1 could see immediately what the issues were and this allowed her to plan useful activities, in keeping with the reciprocal relationship between context and classroom learning in the literature on ecological approaches (Kramsch et al., 2010). Author 1’s actions also highlighted the collaborative nature of the project, she was ‘in’ this project alongside the participants. She was willing to step outside the classroom with them and wait in the freezing February evening together. As a result, the issue of the bus became less daunting. It was clear that the ecological approach, the ‘languaging’ in the outside world, rather than in the bubble of the classroom would be central to the project. The New Scots principle of ‘integration from day one’ needed ‘support from day one’ which was accessible, ethical and multilingual as a necessity. In this way, it also needed to be highly sensitive to context and to co-create materials to ensure context was at the heart of the ethics of care for the learners and the researcher.

Learning from the pilot

The pilot enabled us to establish a foundation for working multilingually and translanguaging with the dynamics of the participants not sharing a language outside their family groups. Working multilingually was slow to start with but established a foundation on which to build. By the end of each session, Author 1 had used every Arabic word she knew but that still left her lacking in Tigrinya, Tamil and Farsi. During the pilot she wondered whether they were enjoying the sessions. Her fieldnotes below pick up at the point of ending the second session.

As we finish the session, I open the door for Semira, Rushani and Kamila. I smile and thank them for coming, trying to remember the word for ‘goodbye’ in Tamil, Arabic and Tigrinya. Semira is last to leave. I offer her the grapes and biscuits that are left, and she picks them up and thanks me. As she reaches the door, I put my hand up to gesture ‘bye’, she reaches out, presses her palm to mine, shakes her head and looks directly into my eyes, (I notice for the first time that we are the same height and close up she might be nearer to my age than I first thought). She pauses and corrects me with a smile and tells me in Tigrinya: ‘ciao ciao’. I hold her eye contact, smile straight back and respond with her palm still pressed against mine ‘ciao ciao’. We will do this in Tigrinya from now on.

The pilot underlined the ‘messiness’ of this genuine human interaction as it was not easy to communicate with so little shared language. There was often confusion. Author 1 and the participants could not understand every word that was said but they ‘languaged’ together rather than aiming for grammatical perfection. The approach prioritised trust and collaboration. For the participants, this meant working in English for the first time. For Author 1, it meant working in Tigrinya, Arabic, Farsi and Tamil for the first time.

Semira’s ‘investment’ was clear when she started initiating interaction with Author 1 in Tigrinya, by touching her hand and saying goodbye in Tigrinya. This became their way of saying goodbye at the end of all subsequent meetings. Author 1 was careful to always respond in Tigrinya rather than English. She felt that reaching this level of comfort had happened more quickly than it might have done had they worked solely in English and that the use of their languages ‘enhanced interpersonal interaction’ (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). It shifted the power in Semira’s favour as Author 1 had to ask Semira for repetition or clarification or how to write a word in the script with which Semira was most familiar.

Building confidence and independence through multilingual learning from ‘day one’

All participants felt the project increased their confidence. Travelling to the sessions was undoubtedly challenging, however, Rushani told Author 1 ‘we come because this is helping us, that’s why we need to do that’. Rushani also confirmed that she was able to practise the language she had learnt in class to help her settle into life in Glasgow: ‘I’m using what we learn in class in my daily life, it’s very practical – using the bus, shopping, food, going to the doctor, the places we’ve been to’.

Rushani told Author 1 that she found translanguaging helpful and that this helped her comprehension, ‘we prefer to have Tamil as well in the class because if you just use English, we don’t understand what you’re speaking so we are not able to follow you, it’s better if you use Tamil.’ Semira told Author 1 that using Tigrinya also helped her accuracy, ‘from the beginning the class is good. It’s helping me like a dictionary between Tigrinya and English’. Semira added: ‘Even though it’s difficult, because you told me in Tigrinya I understand’. All participants agreed a multilingual approach was useful at this early stage of their learning and agreed the classes had built their confidence. In the final interview Rushani told Author 1: ‘I have confidence to go to a community ESOL class now, I didn’t before’.

The approach built on the participants’ existing linguistic knowledge and recognised the great many skills the women brought with them to the study. It built on these and also changed their context from to one of anxiety, novelty and disorientation to one where community ESOL classes felt within grasp. Acknowledging this linguistic knowledge also provided reassurance that they were not starting at the very beginning and that the languages they already knew had value and significance. As Kramsch and Vork Steffensen (2008) note, ‘the meaning of a new piece of knowledge will emerge not from the syllabus but from the connections the learner will make with his/her own prior knowledge and experience’(p.392). As many ESOL learners already know several languages and will add English to their repertoires during their time in Scotland, it makes sense to tap into these linguistic resources and draw them into learning for practical reasons, particularly when languages other than English are such a large part of the learners’ repertoires at this initial stage. As Simpson (2020) recognises, it does not make sense to teach people to be more multilingual through solely monolingual methods.

Impact beyond practical benefits

This section focuses on the impact of the approach beyond the practical benefits of increased accuracy and comprehension. In this section we discuss the key themes of linguistic incompetence, symmetry and empowerment and their significance during this initial stage of integration.

Languaging beyond or besides words

The impact of this decolonising approach was shown by the participants' increased willingness to initiate conversation with Author 1 in their languages. Author 1's fieldnotes from session 13 illustrate an example of this:

Yasmine points to the window and asks me in Farsi to shut it because she is cold. There is an acceptance that she can ask in Farsi and I wonder if she had felt that she could only use English in this space whether she would have asked at all? Or would she have sat there feeling cold, unsure of how to ask in English?

These small actions, this increase in visibility and acceptance gives us alternative ways of communicating. It is my responsibility to understand her request in Farsi, not her responsibility to ask me in English. It is a joint effort to understand each other between our languages. This is two-way, mutual integration.

Yasmine pulls out her phone to translate her request but it is not necessary – we have languaged our way around the issue, I am quickly on my feet and the window is shut. I ask Yasmine to tell me her request in Farsi and I note it down so I know this for next time, I write 'can you shut the window please?' and 'I'm cold' on the board in English and we check the equivalent in Tigrinya and Tamil and use body language to show 'brrrr… I'm cold'. This language has emerged from the 'semiotic activity' which van Lier (2002) describes. The content of our learning has emerged from the physical ecology which surrounds us. Once this new language is practised and everyone is comfortable we move back to our topic of shopping.

This languaging is messy and imperfect, partial with gaps filled through non-verbal language to communicate what is necessary. There is a transience of communicating in the moment shown by Yasmine asking Author 1 in Farsi to shut the window. Yasmine did not ask in Farsi because Author 1 could understand Farsi well, but because the sessions have created openness for Yasmine to use her language. There is no need for perfect grammatical sentences but there is a very real and unavoidable need for communication and to 'language' together using whatever linguistic resources available be it in Tamil, English, Farsi or Tigrinya or multimodal and embodied ways of communicating 'beyond – or *beside/s* words' (Thurlow, 2016, p. 503).

Linguistic incompetence as solidarity and mutuality

Linguistic incompetence is a term used by Author 2 [redacted] to describe a process by which linguistic power is both held and ceded. It is context specific and operates subtly but can be deployed as part of an ethics of care and mutuality as part of co-building content and curriculum with newly arrived 'New Scots'. Author 1's linguistic incompetence and lack of knowledge of Tamil, Tigrinya and Farsi became a defining feature of her interactions with the participants. This balance of power was defined by Author 1 participating as learner. As Flores and García (2013) note; 'it is one thing for a monolingual teacher to encourage students to take risks, and quite another for a teacher to model what taking these risks might look like' (p.253). In this case, these risks illustrated a teacher taking as much time as the participants to learn, providing an up-close example of how much repetition is needed to learn new language. Semira described this as learning 'little by little'. Author 1's lack of their languages also placed her on a more equal footing with the participants which Rushani felt was 'comfortable for us.'

García and Wei (2014) suggest that teachers should not view a lack of linguistic knowledge as a barrier to embracing translanguaging pedagogy and that teachers should encourage learners to take a more active role in their own learning. García and Wei (2014) suggest 'the teacher makes an effort to make herself understood using Spanish, and the students try to make themselves understood using English. In doing so more English is being added to the linguistic repertoire of the students, and more Spanish to that of the teacher' (p. 112). In this study, the participants added more English to their repertoires and Author 1 added some Farsi, Arabic, Tigrinya and Tamil to her own, putting the 'two-way' process of 'New Scots' into practice and taking it beyond policy into everyday life as a meaningful, collaborative process. Participants agreed 'two-way integration is recognised in our class'.

Seeing Author 1 struggle to communicate in Tigrinya, Farsi, Arabic and Tamil also illustrated that human dialogical interaction was the priority rather than grammatical perfection which would have been an unrealistic and demotivating goal at this stage. As García and Wei (2014) found, translanguaging 'shows students how to privilege interaction and collaborative dialogue over form and thus develops their voice'(p.112). It is here that an interesting paradox emerges whereby struggle, confusion, disorientation in the facilitator/researcher provides a strong frame in a context where all are learners but those newly arrived are themselves experiencing disorientation. This development of points of common, emotional and practical connection, through vulnerability and incompetence, create a context for the development of confidence.

'We're equal unknown in Tigrinya and English'

The fact that Author 1's attempts to use Tigrinya, Tamil and Farsi were limited did not seem to matter to the participants. Over the course of the project, she managed to grasp a few greetings, and some simple vocabulary at most. She remained incompetent in their languages (particularly Tamil which she found much harder to pronounce or make sense of). In one session, Lakmini repeated for her in rapid fire and laughed shyly when Author 1 pronounced a Tamil word wrong for the fourth time. Frustrated with herself, Author 1 carried on with the session whilst making a note on her notepad and showing the participants: 'my homework – next time'.

Before the next session Author 1 checked the online dictionary for the words Lakmini had told her and practised them, determined to show that she had made an effort and could manage at least a few words in Tamil. At the start of the session, she told Lakmini she had done her homework and pronounced the Tamil words as well as she could. Lakmini responded 'yes'! and laughed and clapped at these efforts. Just as their investment in the project was clear, so too was Author 1's. Author 1 had taken this home to learn and spent time learning the words Lakmini had taught her in an effort to get them right. Such exchanges directly shifted the balance of power in their relationship. Levine (2020) proposes an emphasis on 'the collaborative, cooperative activity of teacher and students together, in particular moving away from the teacher being the sole provider of all that is to be learned' (p. 81). This project required such collaboration.

This symmetry and Author 1's 'struggle' with their languages was evident from day one. Semira noted at the first interview: 'you and me, we're the same. You struggle with Tigrinya and I struggle with English'. This sense of mutuality was highlighted on several other occasions in the way Semira described Author 1's efforts to learn Tigrinya. She told Author 1 she could see they were 'equal unknown', that they were 'the same' and that her struggle to learn Tigrinya was 'just like' Semira's efforts to learn English. Semira also illustrated her increased confidence by making these comments directly to Author 1 which sharply contrasted with the first day in the BRC waiting room when she hesitated to make eye contact.

[redacted] notes how such 'linguistic incompetence' is a powerful tool to express solidarity by using a non-dominant language in an unexpected context and how this is particularly beneficial when working with people experiencing 'pressure or pain' in the context of seeking asylum. Both Rushani and Lakmini told Author1 several times that they found the use of Tamil in the class helpful, and their comments showed that her efforts were appreciated and seen as important.

This 'linguistic hospitality', is a necessary 'mediation between host and guest languages' (Kearney, 2019, p. 1) which supports the 'two-way' integration process. Kearney (2019) describes 'linguistic hospitality' as a middle road 'where one honour's both host and guest languages equally, while resisting the take-over of one by the other' (p. 1). This is not assimilation in linguistic terms, it is meeting each other halfway through mutual language learning and effort on both sides.

'Using my own language in class gives me power'

Semira noted, 'It's quite good when you are able to teach me in my own language, it gave me power. It empowered me. I thought 'Oh, she's able to teach me by my own language so why not? I will learn English. It empowered me to learn and to come each time.' Semira's words strongly underline how well this multilingual, decolonising approach suited her. She was generous in saying that Author 1 was 'able' to teach her in her own language as they both knew how limited Author 1's Tigrinya was. However, Author 1's willingness to give a word in Tigrinya alongside English seemed enough for Semira to feel 'empowered to learn'.

These multilingual practices went some way towards addressing the unequal power relations on which Norton's 'investment' is based by opposing the 'subordinate student identities' which Norton (2013, p. 17) warns can be created within typical teacher/student power relations, in turn impacting on motivation. Working multilingually and reducing the status of English supported the participants to construct a 'more empowering identity'(Canagarajah, 2011, p. 20) which was reflected in the key finding: 'Using my language in class made me feel welcome and comfortable'.

In the final interview, Semira told Author 1 using Tigrinya gave her 'confidence and independence'. The approach was not based on deficit or what she could not do rather than on what she could. This style of learning suited her, she *invested* in in this way of working together and found confidence in her role as co-collaborator and as Author 1's Tigrinya teacher.

Liminality, communitas and identity

As the research met the participants at a time of profound change in their lives, Author 1 drew on the concept of 'liminality' to help better understand the significance of this transition and its impact on their work. Turner (1969) defines liminality as a place of 'betwixt and between' of being 'neither here nor there'. Beech (2011) connects this middle stage with a process of identity construction and reconstruction when a person is ‘neither one thing nor the other’(p. 286). The project can be viewed as a liminal space between existing identity and the new identity created through the process of learning another language and adjusting to a new life in Scotland. During this transition phase, social structures are disrupted and the usual limits of thought, self-understanding and behaviour are relaxed to accommodate this regeneration (Beech, 2011).

Turner (1969) extends the concept of liminality to include ‘communitas’, which sees society as ‘unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated’ as it emerges in the liminal period whilst sharing a common experience through a rite of passage. Turner (1969) notes how ‘each individual’s life experience contains alternating exposure to structure and communitas, and to states and transitions’ (p.361). This ‘communitas’ and disrupting of social structures was evidenced through the shift in the balance of power created by Author 1 participating as learner and was clearly shown in Semira’s observations that she and Author 1 were ‘the same’ and ‘equal’. As [redacted] notes ‘decolonising is, indeed, the changing of the relationships of power, control and dependency into ones where there can be a shift towards an equality that was not possible under the previous arrangements’(p. 23). These liminal shifts were framed within the ecology of the relationships between the participants and Author 1, as their identities adapted.

Van Lier (2004b) also recognises this process of adapting to a host community and notes the impact this has on identity; ‘when people find themselves in a new culture with a new language, they need to develop new identities to reconnect their deep sense of self to the new surroundings’ (p.96). The project was a process of adaptation and change where neither the participants nor the researcher would emerge quite the same as they had begun.

Investment

Semira’s investment was clear throughout the project: by her attendance and her frequently arriving early and helping Author 1 to set up the room and in her careful teaching of Author 1 in Tigrinya. Author 1’s fieldnotes show the importance of the time they spent together outside of the learning sessions.

Semira arrived at 3.20pm today and helped me to set up again. She appears to enjoy this time together and we have established simple routines for doing this together. I try to remember the words in Tigrinya for the items as we set up: ብሽኮቲ_bshkoti, ወይኒ ኣረየ, weyni 'areye, ሻሂ shahi, ቡን bun, ዋንጫ wanča - *biscuits, grapes, tea, coffee, cup. These are our shared rituals. She is the only one who comes this early, knowing I will be here.*

There is a quiet, calm sense of companionship in this work of setting up together. She chooses to be here, to come to the room 40 minutes early before the others arrive. We meet here in the classroom with a quiet, companionable understanding of things we cannot explain to each other verbally, in this space between our languages. This time that we spend together is as important and necessary as the time within the learning sessions. It is the building of our relationships, the establishing of this context in which to learn, to share, to redefine these parameters of learning and of being (together).

How much this project means to Semira is shown further when the interpreters come for the interviews later in the same session:

I notice Semira listening intently as I explain the purpose of the research again and I watch her sit up straighter when I tell her how important her role is and how much her opinions matter. The interpreter carefully explains this to Semira. I wait and listen to her very carefully give long, considered responses about what these sessions mean to her and about *using Tigrinya in class. Seeing the way Semira responds shows me how seriously she is taking this project. I am confident of her investment and I have a deep respect and appreciation for the way she considers her responses and speaks at length.*

Conclusions

The study is limited in size and duration. Due to the make-up of the group, we were not able to explore translanguaging outside each family group. However, there were clear benefits of working with such a small group as it allowed Author 1 to provide the high levels of support needed at this crucial stage in the participants' lives. Had the group been much bigger it might have been difficult to provide so much individual support and as such, this ‘limitation’ in size became a strength of the research. The study was never seeking statistical significance however, but rather provides indicative conclusions which allow for further iterations of the CPAR spiral in each language learning and integration ecology.

The findings illustrate that an ecological, multilingual approach to language learning is effective and welcome with reunited refugee families within their first tentative weeks settling into the host community. Such initial mutual language learning sessions would work well as a precursor to the community ESOL provision already in place as participants felt this initial period of intensive multilingual support enabled them to build confidence to move into community classes at the end of the project.

The project illustrated the increased empowerment and confidence the participants felt by beginning their journey of learning English in Scotland in this gentle, highly supported way which allowed them to work with their children in their own languages. As the participants knew so little English at this stage using their full linguistic resources facilitated communication.

The approach had clear practical benefits. The participants felt using their own languages increased their accuracy and comprehension, however it is the impact beyond the practical benefits which clearly stand out in the findings. The findings clearly show that it does not matter if the teacher cannot speak the same languages as the learners in order to be able to use translanguaging pedagogy. In fact there are particular benefits of the teacher participating as learner as García and Wei (2014) note. Reducing the status of the teacher/researcher increased feelings of equality between the participants and the researcher/teacher and the participants’ words are powerful in evidencing how much they valued this approach.

Increased funding is needed to provide quicker access at the point of arrival to support the New Scots aim of ‘integration from day one’ with initial language learning sessions which are grounded in linguistic hospitality. Further consideration is also needed of how multilingual approaches can be embedded and fostered at this initial stage of integration to enable refugee women to build on their existing linguistic knowledge as part of a multilingual pedagogy which positively highlights linguistic diversity and empowers refugee women to take a more active role in their learning. Moving from the liminal phase into new societal and learning structures requires more than a translanguaging approach in the initial contact phase but a re-orientation of pedagogies around an ethics of care, mutuality, co-learning and co-languaging.

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