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Special Issue on the Cultural and Educational Challenges of Migration and Language Acquisition



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Editorial Introduction

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Migration and language education remain pivotal concerns in multilingual societies shaped by mobility, labour markets, and policies of inclusion and exclusion. This special issue brings together three empirical studies that, from distinct theoretical and institutional vantage points, interrogate how language training, language education, and communicative participation intersect with power relations, social positioning, and professional identities in contexts of migration and professional integration. The articles critically examine (1) refugee English language training in Australia, (2) the marginalisation of heritage languages and teachers in Italy, and (3) linguistic participation in medical workplace placements in Sweden. Each article advances our understanding of language education beyond proficiency outcomes to encompass structural inequalities, institutional practices, and communicative realities that shape migrants' linguistic trajectories.

The 'Symbolic Violence' of Refugee Language Training in Australia

Yi-Jung Teresa Hsieh's contribution offers a compelling critique of mainstream English training programs for refugee migrants in Australia, notably the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and Skills for Education and Employment (SEE). Using Bourdieu's theoretical lens, Hsieh interrogates how ostensibly neutral language provision may reproduce social disadvantage. Through qualitative interviews with eight male Muslim refugees, the study identifies structural and pedagogical deficiencies that limit refugees' access to employment and meaningful settlement outcomes. While the programs

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may meet performance indicators contractually mandated by policymakers, they fail to acknowledge learners' prior linguistic capital, constrain pathways to vocational integration, and inadvertently impose a form of "symbolic violence" that sustains inequality.

Hsieh's critique highlights how educational policies, educational metrics, and resource allocations produce an epistemic gap between institutional assessments of "success" and migrants' lived realities—a gap that perpetuates marginalisation. Importantly, the study not only diagnoses systemic shortcomings but also points to the need for integrative approaches that align language learning with workplace experience and sustained socio-economic participation. The article thus pushes the field toward a more critical examination of policy design and the socio-political stakes of language training in settler societies.

The Marginalisation of Heritage Languages and Teachers in Italy

Barbara Gross's study shifts focus to heritage language education (HLE) within the Italian educational system, revealing how national commitments to inclusion remain largely rhetorical. Grounded in a migration pedagogical framework and based on interviews with heritage language teachers (HLTs) and educational stakeholders, the article demonstrates the fragmented nature of HLE provision in Italy. Although ministerial guidelines endorse linguistic diversity, practical implementation is inconsistent and locally driven, leaving heritage languages (HLs) and their teachers peripheral to formal curricula.

Gross's analysis reveals a multi-layered marginalisation: HLTs are often excluded from regular teaching structures, face precarious working conditions, and lack opportunities for professional development. These structural conditions limit their potential to transform educational practices or support equitable linguistic outcomes for multilingual learners. The article situates these patterns within broader socio-cultural power relations and argues that without targeted policy reform, HLE will remain contingent on individual educators and local initiatives rather than embedded in institutional norms.

Critically, Gross problematises the deficit framing of linguistic diversity and calls for collaborative engagement among all educational stakeholders to reconfigure the status of HLs in Italian schools. Her study underscores the importance of structural policy action—not only to legitimise linguistic diversity but also to democratise the educational space in migration-affected contexts.

Linguistic Participation During Workplace Placement at a Swedish Hospital

Stina Hållsten's article examines linguistic participation in a professional workplace context by analysing how medical doctors communicate—and how a medical student on clinical placement participates—in routine institutional interactions in a Swedish hospital. Drawing on detailed observational data, the study captures how senior physicians engage in a range of speech acts—topic shifts, humour, reasoning aloud, delegation—that reflect both medical and social dimensions of professional discourse. In contrast, the student's verbal participation is minimal, revealing the hierarchical nature of communicative practices and the challenges implicit in navigating professional discourse as a learner.

Hållsten's study contributes to language education by foregrounding the complexity of communicative competence in high-stakes professional settings. It problematises the assumption that workplace placements naturally yield language learning opportunities and argues for the need to design placements that afford active engagement in authentic communicative practices. The emphasis on "hybridity" of institutional role and linguistic participation enriches our understanding of how language, identity, and professional trajectories intersect in workplace learning.

Interrelationships and Contributions to Migration and Language Education

Taken together, the three articles reveal different yet interconnected dimensions of how language education and communicative participation intersect with structural inequities in migration contexts. Hsieh's work critiques macro-level policy frameworks that underprepare refugee learners for socio-economic participation. Gross's article underscores the institutional marginalisation of linguistic diversity and educators within formal schooling. Hållsten's study highlights micro-level communicative practices that shape professional participation and identity formation in workplace settings.

Despite their diverse contexts—settlement programs, educational systems, and workplace placements—each article foregrounds how *institutional practices, power relations, and communicative norms structure language learning opportunities and constrain equitable participation*. They collectively challenge reductive notions of language proficiency as merely linguistic competence and instead situate it within broader socio-institutional processes. Furthermore, these studies exemplify the commitment of *Migration and Language Education* to critical, empirically grounded scholarship that attends to the lived realities of learners in migration-affected contexts, and that interrogates how language education intersects with issues of equity, identity, and social inclusion.