Languages as objects of learning: language learning as a case of multilingualism

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This paper considers multilingualism from the point of view of language learning and teaching. We discuss the 'monological' thinking in linguistics and in the research of language learning and teaching and argue that the monological stand, more often than not, also embeds a monolingual bias. As an alternative to monologism, we discuss dialogical notion of language and argue that this inherently involves a multilingual stand.

Keywords: dialogism, language learning and teaching, multilingualism, languaging

Introduction

In this paper, we discuss the conceptualizations of language in the context of second and foreign language learning and teaching[1], aiming at commenting both research and classroom practices. We will argue that these conceptualizations have frequently been monological (Bakhtin 1981, 1986; Linell 2009: 387-423), but also, monolingually biased (e.g. Block 2007). Consequently, the development of second and foreign languages, as other instances of bilingual and multilingual language use have been regarded in terms of 'double monolingualism' (e.g. Hinnenkamp 2005) or 'parallel monolingualisms' (e.g. Heller 1999). Drawing on dialogical philosophy of language, as discussed by the members of the Bakhtin Circle (for a fuller discussion, see Brandist 2002; Dufva 2004b), Bakhtin and Voloshinov, but referring also to recent work within critical applied linguistics, sociolinguistics and language education, we argue for 'multilinguality' as the default assumption in the description of language and also, as a starting point in the discussions of language learning and teaching.

Mihail Bakhtin saw his philosophy of dialogue as an alternative to *monological* views he criticized: these were perspectives suggesting a unity controlled by a singular voice or authority (Bakhtin 1984: 78-100). Further, Bakhtin (1993: 12-13, 22) also criticized *theoretism*, by which he designated philosophies basing on rationalist thought. These, as Bakhtin saw it, failed to account for the lived actuality of the world. Considering this from the point of view of analyzing language, a theoretistically and monologically oriented description would detach 'language' from language use and describe it as a unitary abstract system

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of formally represented rules and items. In contrast, the starting point of dialogism is to regard 'language' in terms of concrete language use, the actual eventing that can also be called *languaging* (see e.g. Pietikäinen et al. 2008) and study language from the assumption that it is essentially *heteroglossic* (Bakhtin 1981, 1986).

We will argue below that the dialogical notion of language suggests that language itself is essentially 'multilingual'. As language use is characterized by variation (by situation) and change (over time) at the societal level, this entails a view that also individuals are 'multilingual' from the very beginning. For learners, no language – not even the first one – is singular, but rather, a plurality of usages and perspectives. In this paper, we suggest that language learning is a process in which different semiotic – heteroglossic and multimodal – resources are appropriated and that first, second and additional languages should not be regarded as enclosed systems of separate abstract codes. This view is highly consequential for how languages are seen in classrooms and as objects of language education.

Monologism in linguistics and language education

In this section, we will discuss four features that we see as characteristic of the monological and monolingual conception of language. Firstly, the word 'language' frequently refers to and is understood in terms of a *national language.* Regarded in this manner, language is seen as a singular entity, an essentially enclosed system. This conceptualization – languages in the sense of, e.g. 'Finnish' or 'French' – is probably the most common way languages are talked about in the context of teaching and learning. Secondly, another line of argumentation is the idea that 'language' can be captured by an *abstract, decontextual* set of (grammatical) rules, a grammar. Thirdly, the above positions often intertwine with a *formalist* stand in which linguistic forms and structures are regarded as primary objects of linguistic study and/or language learning. Fourthly, the monological conceptualization often involves a *scriptist* bias (Taylor 1997) or *written language bias* (Linell 2005), a bias that can be seen in various contexts of language education. Below, we argue that monological representations of language have been most typical both within research and in educational discourses and classroom practices.

"One learns a language"

First, to see language through the notion of national language often means that each 'language entity' is regarded as internally cohesive but at the same time, autonomous in regard with other languages and 'different' from them. With the development of the nation states the concept of 'language' became to be attached to a particular territory. When geographical borders were raised, also languages started to be regarded as being separated by boundaries (e.g. Hobsbawm 2004). The discourses of linguistic autonomy and difference are closely connected with the ideology of the nation state and the emergence of national languages (e.g. Joseph 2006).

Nevertheless, the ideology of nationalism does not make a difference *horizontally* – by drawing a boundary between any two languages – but also *vertically*, by elevating one variant – the variant chosen to be the 'standard' language – over other usages (for a discussion of 'language error', see Dufva 1992). One language common to all citizens was seen as an important political tool, and the development of the national standard led to the idea that usages could and should be homogenized. The norms for the standard language that were codified in grammars and dictionaries came to play an important role in language education and in classrooms. The backwash effect of this was that grammars came to serve as not only models and guidelines for language users (either in L1 or L2), but started to be regarded as the very object of learning.

The concept of 'national language', not surprisingly, involves a monolingual stand. At the societal, national level, the politics of one common language also aimed at marginalizing different variants – such as dialects – and minoritizing other languages in the area in question. At the same time, the normativity present in the standard language may also lead to the idea that crossover phenomena between languages and usages are negative and potentially problematic as such. The most conspicuous example is perhaps linguistic purism the advocates of which aims at guarding a particular mother tongue against 'foreign', 'corrupting' influence. However, similar tenets that conceptualise multilingual contact as essentially harmful are not difficult to find in other contexts. For example, not that long ago an exposure to two languages was seen as a potential threat to a child's linguistic development.

Today, the above idea of a language, drawing on the ideologies of nationalism[2], is being challenged. The essentialist arguments of one single, homogeneous language are now being deconstructed and replaced by the idea that 'a language', such as Finnish or French, is a social and cultural artifact, a construction that originally served political and ideological purposes (see e.g. Makoni & Pennycook 2007). For linguists involved in studying the learning and teaching of first, second and foreign language instruction, however, the question remains: if we do not teach and learn 'a' language ('Finnish', 'English') what is it, then, that needs to be taught and learned?

"One learns the language by internalizing its grammar"

Grammar is a central notion in language teaching. Teachers regard it as essential (see e.g. Salo 2008) and similarly, learners often refer to it as an important, whether they like it or not (see e.g. Kalaja et al. forthcoming). Thus grammar is often seen as a major part – sometimes *the base* – of language learning. For our argument here, it is also essential to observe that a grammar of *a* language is also intrinsically monolingual: the whole impetus for designing such grammars connects with the idea of national languages discussed above. In a way, then, pedagogical grammars – whether confessing prescriptivity or not – necessarily offer the learners a consensus of how the language should be used. Mostly, they offer a single norm and, in that, they also offer "pure" language.

However, the role of grammar in language learning and teaching also intertwines with the notions of grammar in theoretical linguistics and particularly to the strands of thinking that Voloshinov (1976) – naming Saussure

as one representative – called *abstract objectivism.* Being 'abstract', this perspective turns away from studying language in its diverse concrete contexts and actual manifestations. Being 'objectivist', it results in views that reify language, analyzing it as objects. Language is herein treated as an abstract code that underlies the language use.

One can argue that abstract objectivism has been the underlying philosophy of the mainstream second language acquisition research until this century but it is, clearly, the underlying ideology of most grammars and textbooks in language education as well. More often than not, the objectives of learning are represented in terms of linguistic descriptions which are not only abstractions (of the actual usages) but also represent language knowledge in an object-like manner: as grammatical rules and lexical items, using heavy metalinguistic terminology that describes language in terms of, e.g., *verbs*, *adjectives* and *past perfects.* As a result, young learners already grow to regard their task as internalizing these 'language objects' or 'language items' (see e.g. Dufva, Alanen & Aro 2003; Aro 2004, 2009).

However, to see 'grammar' as the *object* of learning seems to be a category mistake where explicit, articulated knowledge of language (such as an explicit verbal formulation of a grammatical rule) is taken for procedural knowledge. It needs to be pointed out that 'knowing a grammatical rule' – in the sense that one would be able to produce a grammatical utterance in either spoken or written form - is not identical with being able to recite the verbal formulation of this rule. Nor does the memorization of grammatical morphemes, signaling, e.g. how to produce a past participle, result in the ability to use these forms correctly past participles.

Language learners who encounter decontextual but at the same time highly objectified representations of language in the context of formal education are thus led to believe that one's goal is to learn *the* grammatical knowledge and lexical items of *the* language. Learning comes to be seen as a process of *addition.* The view draws on the metaphor of 'mind as a container', that is, a view where human mind (or, memory) is seen as a storage system that allows the transfer of 'outside' information into 'internalised' mental rules and representations (for criticism, see e.g. Dufva 1998, 2004b). However, when mind is seen metaphorically as a container, what is learned comes to be seen in terms of *countable* knowledge – such as rules (grammar) or items (word). Moreover, these metaphors also seem to suggest that items can be added until the *whole language* is learned, the process of acquisition is *complete* and a *full* competence is gained.

However, both the idea that one can learn a language in its totality and the idea that this happens with the help of a grammar that exhaustively describes the language are incorrect. First, grammars do not encapsulate *the* language. All grammars are originally filtered from observations of spoken usages (see e.g. Blommaert 2005) and in that, they embed a series of interpretations and valorizations and at the same time, they leave certain usages unobserved or censor them. Grammars are not *pictures* of a language. However, once in existence, they have a powerful influence in the language and they thus strengthen monolingual normativity. Considering what we argued above, grammars are almost bound to be monolingually biased. Second, as it is now generally recognized (see e.g. Rothman 2008), a monolithic competence of a language is not feasible: the proficiency of any speaker consists of a personal repertoire of certain registers, varieties, dialects and modality-specific usages.

These arguments make it necessary to reconsider the role of grammar in language learning and teaching.

"Language learning means learning of forms"

To continue, we argue that a monological and monolingual bias can also manifest itself in the *formalist* position that has been – and still is – strong in second and foreign language learning research – and that also marks the practices of language education. A focus on studying how the formal knowledge of the language develops often ignores the question of how the knowledge is transformed into actual usages, that is, into a productive use of language in its spoken and written forms, or, into socially and culturally appropriate usages. The decontextual, formal grammars are representations where the *system-internal* logic and/or the *connections between two language systems* are important: that is, learners are given instructions of how to construct a syntactically appropriate utterance or given correspondences between two or more lexical items. This perspective downplays aspects that might be equally or more relevant: How do the items relate to meanings to be expressed? How does one act in order to produce socially and culturally acceptable utterances? How does the knowledge help one to comment upon one's own experiences or talk about the events of the social world at hand? In other words, the socially and cultural relevant aspects that might also be called semantic and pragmatic are downplayed or missing. Hereby, language systems come to be separated from their social contexts, their functions as a tool of interaction and thus, from their use.

From the point of theoretical linguistics to focus either on form (formalism) or meaning and/or function in language (functionalism) in its analysis is just a matter of choice. Very possibly, however, the issue should be seen differently in those fields of study where the real-life language learners are concerned and particularly, if one also seeks to understand how the practices of language education should be developed. In language education, the formalist approach puts emphasis on the order and patterning in the language system and plays down its meaningfulness, its potential for signification and its role as a functional tool. However, the latter would clearly seem to be more important for most learners. Still, even today, primacy is often given to teaching and learning of formal knowledge, and also, evaluating the language learners' performance in terms of its formal accuracy

"Language is learned from books"

A final observation about the monological stand is its *scriptism* – an age-old bias in the linguistic study that was observed and criticized already by Voloshinov (1973). Put simply, in linguistics scriptism or written language bias (see e.g. Harris 1980; Linell 2005) refers to approaches in which the starting point of the analysis has been the written representation of language. Although scriptism has been more of a hidden agenda than an explicit credo, the effects in linguistic sciences have been manifold. It can be argued that many constructs that have

been considered as building blocks of human language actually derive from written representations and literacy-based conventions (for the closer discussion, see Linell 2005).

It is not difficult to find a scriptist bias in the ideals and practices of language education. There is ample evidence coming from different contexts and sources that the classroom practices draw on written materials and center around literacy (for the Finnish context, see e.g. Pitkänen-Huhta 2003; Luukka et al. 2008). Also the tests and exams that have been used to evaluate learners' proficiency often measure written language and/or academic skills, as was for some time ago already pointed out by Cummins (1981). Studies also indicate that learners' beliefs are much influenced by written language and literacy. Studying Finnish children's metalinguistic awareness, Dufva and Alanen (2005) found a noticeable impact of literacy in how children were able to analyse language and speak about it. Aro (2009) showed that even though young Finnish children studying English at school saw learning to *speak* English as their goal, they thought that the best way of doing this was by *reading.* Further, in a study where Finnish university students of English were asked to draw a picture of themselves as 'a learner of English', Kalaja et al. (2008) found that the students' drawings overwhelmingly represented learning in terms of literacy and books.

To conclude, in this chapter we have argued that what we call the monological position is connected with various social, cultural and intellectual developments in the past. Such cultural inventions as writing, literacy and print are at play there and power – whether social, political, economical or religious – is perhaps the most important underlying factor. The dynamic interplay of these forces – and others that we have not been able to discuss here – underlies the representations of language: in theoretical linguistics, in second language acquisition research, in foreign language textbooks, and in classroom talk.

In the monological conceptualizations, the nationalist ideology of one language is combined with the idea of its decontextualised, formal grammar presented in a written form. Thus also today's young language learners are supposed to learn, e.g., '*English*' using *textbooks* and memorizing *formal* knowledge (such as *grammar*) from the *printed* sources. The conceptualization helps to produce precisely the kind of 'singular voice' or 'authority' that Bakhtin (1984: 78-100) referred to as monological epistemology and that in the classroom results, for example, in the policy of one correct answer. At the same time, this conceptualization – or a bundle of metaphors, if you like – is deeply monolingual. The intertwining features we discussed above are born and bred in the atmosphere of "one language, one norm" and they still help to guise languages as autonomous codes that should be kept parallel, thus never touching. We will discuss this argument in more detail in the following chapter where dialogical premises are introduced.

Dialogical view

The dialogical perspective is in many respects different from the views we discussed above. First, the dialogical conceptualization of language stresses its fluid and changing, essentially dynamic nature. Second, dialogism is among the functionalist directions of language studies, and sees the analysis of meaningful

and functional elements of language use as primary. We argue that the dialogical starting points entail also an understanding of language as an essentially "multi-lingual" phenomenon. Below, we discuss the dialogical theory, relate this to our observations on the monolingual vs. multilingual nature of today's language use and discuss the relevance of this for language learning and language education.

One of the things the dialogical perspective stresses is the varying and changing nature of language, or, its heteroglossia. In English, heteroglossia (see e.g. Bakhtin 1981: 294) is now increasingly used as an overall expression for linguistic diversity. In the original Russian texts, Bakhtin distinguishes between two kinds of linguistic stratification, as Lähteenmäki (2010) shows. On one hand there is "intralingual diversity" (Russian *raznorechie*), internal stratification present in one national language which also testifies for different ideological positions and can be rendered in English as heteroglossia. On other hand, the diversity can also be seen as a presence of various languages and dialects in the community, that is, "language plurality" (*raznojazychie*) that refers to linguistic-level phenomena (for a closer discussion, see Lähteenmäki 2010).

The emphasis on variation and diversity in the arguments of the Bakhtin Circle is not solely "Bakhtinian". It has been suggested that in his discussion of the social stratification of language, Bakhtin draws on the work of early Soviet sociolinguists (for a closer discussion, see Brandist 2003; Lähteenmäki 2009), and it is also interesting how well the dialogical arguments resonate with research foci and interests within contemporary critical sociolinguistic research (see e.g. Makoni & Pennycook 2007; Blommaert 2010). These views challenge the tradition that regards language as a monolith and the implicit monolingualism therein.

Looking at the actual reality of language use – as the dialogists suggest we should do – it can, first, be observed that most language communities are now (and have possibly always been) 'bilingual' or 'multilingual' even in the most traditional sense of the word (see e.g. Tucker 1999). That is, two or more languages are commonly used in most communities and many of their members are functional in their use. Another observation is that practices involving contact between two language communities are by no means exceptional but have been and still are frequent, a fact that is given ample evidence in any textbook of historical linguistics or sociolinguistics.

Contemporary evidence for the Bakhtinian *raznojazychie* is also found in how languages now travel globally through various institutions and practices, such as migration, tourism, working life, human relationships and, importantly, media (for an analysis of sociolinguistics of globalisation, see Blommaert 2003, 2010; for the notion of transcultural flow, see Pennycook 2007). Thus contemporary *raznojazychie* may assume increasingly new forms because the presence of many languages in people's everyday lives does not involve only 'slow' face-to-face contacts but also 'rapid' virtual ones. What this strongly suggests is that perhaps most individuals now grow to be multilingual also by these new routes and – even if only *to a degree* – have multilingual affordances (for the notion of affordances, see van Lier 2004). Thus also opportunities for appropriating these multilingual usages increase.

Furthermore, and as Bakhtin's (1981) argument suggests, also national languages themselves, such as 'Russian' or 'French', consist of different socially and functionally stratified usages. What this suggests is that people do not learn

'a' language (in the sense of a unified code) even in the case of their mother tongue. Rather, what people learn is a variety of ways to understand and to use the linguistic, or, more largely, *semiotic* resources around them. Learners appropriate usages that are situated and modality-specific – and thus each learner comes to have at his/her disposal a unique *repertoire* of where, why, with whom, by what channel and so on we are using language – a view that also brings Hymes' (1974) notion of what speaking means.

As language users, we learn to understand the dialect(s) spoken around us and acquire our own ways of speaking and articulation. We learn to read and, over the years, get familiar with different genres of fact and fiction. We write all kinds of things from simple messages and notes to scientific papers and novels and use different media for these acts. We are constantly exposed to the element of change in semiotic resources – e.g. by the development of new media – that may bring about a change in usages. At present, in addition to face-to-face interaction and written media, language can be accessed and used via telephone, radio, television, computers and cell phones. As the media provide new affordances and spaces for language use, people respond and learn how to listen to a radio talk, consume various television sitcoms and produce language that is appropriate for e-mails, internet chats and SMS-messages. Our argument thus is that what people do with language is from the start multi-modal and "multi-registered".

What we want to argue is that not only are these observations to be taken seriously – as examples of various affordances and constraints for language use but also that language use, more often than not, seems to involve usages and elements from 'other' languages. Through media, advertising, internationally marketed products and commodities other languages seem to be constantly around us. In the Finnish context, for example, people are regularly exposed to English in various everyday activities (see e.g. the papers in Leppänen, Nikula & Kääntä 2008). Borrowings from English are common and many – if not most – Finnish speakers use not only 'English' regularly, but also words like 'yes' and 'okay' – at least occasionally as part of their 'Finnish' repertoire. Trivial observation, one may think. However, if one stops to think, there is a serious question to be asked: to which language system do these words belong? Are they 'English' or 'Finnish'? Neither? Perhaps Finglish? Are they 'borrowings' or 'code-switches' from 'English' - or just lexical items of 'Finnish'? Internationalisms? One might ask, however, whether they are in any way different from learning new words or sayings of one's 'own' language – e.g. academic vocabulary that may be learned fairly late in life – and if they are, what is the difference? As simple as the example may look, we think it may show how in reality the boundaries between 'languages' are constantly blurred and many types of *translanguaging* occur: in the community language use at large, in multi-ethnic contexts in particular, and also, in classroom contexts (see e.g. Garcia 2007; Creese & Blackledge 2010).

In a way, one could follow the above argument even further. Learning to use a word like 'okay' is a tiny, micro-level example of how one's linguistic repertoire is expanded. Learning to understand what actors are saying in an English language sitcom might be another example[3]. Learning to ask for the menu in a restaurant in any foreign language is one more. Learning to read a book, deliver a presentation and carry on a conversation are other examples. Finally, learning to do a *variety* of things in a *variety* of situations in a foreign

language is what could be imagined as an important goal of foreign language learning. However, this seems to be another way of saying that learning a new language means expanding one's understanding and use of different *speech genres,* if one wishes to use the Bakhtinian formulation.

The above view of learning seems to indicate that one should regard the learning outcomes in terms of the processes of use (or, procedural knowledge), not in terms of language knowledge. Thus learning would mean *doing* things with language in novel ways and in novel contexts rather than simply *adding* items in the container of the mind as the monological stand would suggest. It can also be noted that by *doing,* we do not refer to the production of language only but also to the processes of perception, comprehension and understanding which are all-important parts of the learning process (see e.g. Suni 2008) and which are active in character (see e.g. Noe 2004). At the same time, it can be argued that the view of learning as doing speaks against the monolingual stand. Putting the emphasis on the ability to cope with situated usages, it removes the focus from 'languages' in the monological sense and hereby also blurs the borderline between 'mother tongue' and other languages.

What we say above suggests that learning how to *do* things with language should be seen also as an important goal of foreign language education. Dialogically, not only language itself but also language learning is understood as *dynamic.* As Voloshinov (1973) argued, first language learning means entering "upon the stream of verbal communication". In this formulation language is understood as having ('synchronic') situational and contextual variation but also displaying ('diachronic') change over time. Thus the object of learning – i.e. the semiotic resources of any community – are not only varied but also keep changing: while novel usages emerge and new technologies appear, others are becoming unfashionable or obsolete.

The learners' repertoires can be regarded in a similar fashion: the linguistic resources of a particular individual are not 'locked'. They are subject to development, change and modification, in the sense of growth, but also in the sense of forgetting, attrition and loss. Thus the semiotic resources of individuals are 'on the move'. When language learners acquire new usages, some of their old ones may fall out of use: children outgrow their childhood vocabulary and teenagers grow up to be adults also in a linguistic sense. Many factors have an influence in this flux of semiotic resources: entering into a new context (such as school, for instance) or migrating to another linguistic environment altogether can result in the acquisition of new resources but also in the rejection of the former ones.

It is suggested that dynamicity characterizes not only *what* one learns (that is, different usages that are conditioned by varying contexts and modalities) but also *how* one learns. The dialogical approach has a resemblance to those modern theories that regard learners as active agents who develop their skills by participating in various social networks and communities of practice (see e.g. Lantolf & Thorne 2006). Also, 'learning by doing' – a good formulation and one advanced by many educationalists as it is – could be supplemented with the notion of 'learning by moving'. Being mobile creatures, people are able to change their location in a very concrete sense by moving between different contexts in local neighborhoods (e.g. home vs. school) or by moving to a different place (e.g. tourism, studying abroad, working abroad, migration). Thereby language users become exposed to new semiotic resources and – if

participating in new types of interactions and novel practices – the usages and values of these particular language communities may grow upon them.

It is obvious that language users are mobile not only in the sense of concrete voyaging – but also, in a more virtual sense. People may move from one modality to another (speaking vs. writing; text messaging vs. phone talk) and they are able to become members of virtual communities of their choice. Thus being able to move – either in a concrete sense or a more metaphorical one – allows language users to face new types of semiotic resources and provides them opportunities for appropriating these. To summarise, for us the idea of dynamicity also embeds the idea that – in the contemporary world more than ever – *both language usages and people are mobile.* This connects with multilingualism precisely in the sense that learners – during their life span – face new speech genres, assume new positions, attach new values and adjust their language user identities with respect to various usages and languages they encounter (see also Blommaert 2010; Pietikäinen 2010).

In a dynamic conceptualisation like this what language users 'know' and what they can 'do' with language is clearly not as permanent and as stable as the many of the former theories have led us to assume. Instead of thinking language knowledge as static representations and/or schemata, it may be hypothesised that it is a more processual and dynamic kind of knowledge the language users need and come to possess. At the moment, no single theory exists that would adequately capture the dynamic nature of language knowledge and define it as a repertoire of resources that are in a state of constant fluctuation. However, there are theories and speculations that offer insights into what this might be like (for a discussion of neural plasticity and dynamicity of remembering, see e.g. Edelman 1993; for a discussion of distributed cognition, see e.g. Cowley 2005; for the role of embodiment, see e.g. Dufva 2004a).

Further, dialogism is a *functionalist* view to language and presents an opposite to *formalist* perspectives. Both 'functional' and 'functionalism' are ambiguous concepts that can be used in various ways. For the present purpose, we define functionalism as a linguistic stand in which the meaning-making nature of language is seen as a starting point of linguistic analysis and in which the role of language as a functional tool is seen as important. In language education, functionalist approaches most often refer to practices that aim at teaching language in its socially and culturally relevant contexts and that see meaningful and authentic communication as important aims. Bakhtin (2004: 12), in his sole contribution to the field of language education, expresses a clearly functionalist view: "one cannot study grammatical forms without constantly considering their stylistic significance. When grammar is isolated from the semantic and stylistic aspects of speech, it inevitably turns into scholasticism".

However, the challenges of a functional approach in language teaching are many, also depending on whether a 'deep' or 'shallow' form of functional approach is assumed. For example, the question remains whether it is *possible* to teach a foreign language in the classroom in 'deeply' functional manner, resembling 'real-life' language use. That is, how can the learners become exposed to such language use that is both relevant for them and reflects the heteroglossia of language use? How to achieve the meaningfulness and authenticity of communication? How to support the learners' agency and actually engage them in such processes of participation which help them appropriate the usages? How to guarantee the accuracy of language use by

introducing the formal knowledge in a way that maintains the priority of the functional motivation of using these forms and makes the patterning in language an object of the students' own research and reflection? How to evaluate the students' productions if meaningfulness and pragmatic appropriacy are the main criteria? In a deeply functional classroom, language is not the object of teaching as such but also, and primarily, a tool for meaning-making. At the moment, there are many approaches - both in research and in pedagogy – that are seeking answers to questions like these.

To sum up, the dialogical notion of language as a dynamic and heteroglossic phenomenon indicates that the object of learning consists of various semiotic resources that are context-sensitive and fluid in nature. To add, the functionalist commitment of dialogism seems to entail a view that language learners would learn best when they are able to do things with language in different contexts and environments that they consider personally relevant, or, in other words, meaningful in the sense that they are communicatively authentic. This, again, seems to suggest that the use of language(s) – also in the classroom – should have closer connections with the life-world of the learners and/or that the teaching should involve such means and devices that help learners develop their skills not only at school, but also in informal contexts.

Language learning, teaching and multilingualism: Conclusion

In this paper, we distinguished between dialogical and monological conceptualizations of language and discussed their relevance for language learning and teaching research. We argued that the monological approaches are also monolingual in the sense that they highlight the autonomy of each language and its difference from others. We pointed out that the concept of national languages both gave birth to the prescriptive grammars and dictionaries and continued to be mediated by them. We further argued that grammars and dictionaries help to advocate a view of language as a set of reified entities and that these entities, finally, are seen as the objects of learning. At the same time, the monological conceptualisation of language represents it in a formal and decontextual manner. Being based on abstraction, it separates 'language' from the ways in which language is *used* in actual, concrete environments. We have argued that this – monologically and monolingually biased – tradition is still to be seen in language learning research where languages are spoken of as autonomous separate entities or as decontextually represented codes such as L1, L2 and L3. The monological and monolingual conceptualizations help to further a view of the first language and the target language in question as "two solitudes" as Cummins (2005) observes in his discussion of bilingual education.

We discussed dialogical conception of language as an alternative to monologism and aimed at showing that the dialogical arguments would entail also in seeing language as intrinsically multilingual. Drawing on Bakhtin, we argued for the ubiquitous presence of different variants and languages in the communities we live in: language is not *one*, but many. Multilingualism can thus be seen as a default characteristic of 'language' itself[4]. We pointed out that language, as seen from a dialogical perspective, is not object-like and that language learners thus do not learn – and they should not study – collections of objects. Rather, language – also in the context of language learning and language

education – should be seen in terms of semiotic resources (e.g. van Lier 2004), which are, as we argued above, heteroglossic, or, as communicative activity (Thorne & Lantolf 2007) which puts focus on the event-like nature of language. Language learning, then, emerges in various processes of participation where learners appropriate the resources in a situated fashion. Thus the dialogical argument not only entails the view that all language users are – to a degree – 'multilingual' but that no language user is – or can ever be – 'fully' competent. If the essentialist metaphor of language knowledge as a catalogue of items is rejected, we also see that it is impossible to learn 'a' language. Language itself keeps varying and changing as does also any user's repertoire.

We have also suggested above that the theories of language are not only products of the rationalist mind but that they bear traces of the past and present social and cultural milieus (for this argument, see e.g. Toulmin 1990). We argued that theories of language connect to ideologies and values that may not be explicitly recognised any more but that work as a hidden agenda within a particular framework or a theory. An example is how linguistic argumentation has been influenced by the higher prestige of written and printed forms of language or by the nationalist ideology that is still covertly present in how languages are regarded and also, how they are taught in the classrooms.

However, we particularly wanted to point out that a field of applied study that addresses directly such real-life phenomena as second and foreign language learning seriously needs to examine its theoretical commitments and fundamental concepts. Obviously enough, the theories about 'language' do matter: they influence how language education is organized, how teaching materials are designed and how teachers talk about language in the classrooms (see e.g. Salo 2006a, 2006b, 2007). They have an influence on how learners' proficiency is assessed. The conceptualizations of language are significant for the learners themselves as they can bring about not only empowerment and achievement but also, anxiety and marginalization. Welcoming all metatheoretical discussion within the field of language learning and language education, we see theory as intimately connected with *praxis.* In this article, we focused on 'language'. By deconstructing the conceptualizations we have called monological and by discussing the dialogical stand as its alternative, we have hoped to contribute to a better understanding of what learning a language means - and also pointing out how learners might potentially benefit from the multilingual languaging that is going on around them.

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Endnotes

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[2] The idea of *a* language is of course older than nation states. A common language is a vehicle of cohesion for a community – whether an ethnic or religious one – and a way of differentiation from others. Thus it is not only nationalism as such but, rather, the power struggle and pursue for cohesion and homogeneity that are at the core of the notion.

[3] The example applies to the Finnish context where foreign films and television productions are not dubbed but subtitled.

[4] This is not say that the fluidity in language is unhinged or that the omni-present change and development are uncontrollable – both centripetal and centrifugal forces are at work in language use: "Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward' (Bakhtin 1986: 668).