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# Challenging the monolingual mindset: language teachers' pushback and enactment of critical multilingual language awareness in Australian schools

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## ABSTRACT

This study critically interrogates dominant discourses and practices in school settings, which reveal the legitimisation and perpetuation of a monolingual mindset. Through the lens of 'Critical Multilingual Language Awareness' (CMLA), this research unpacked the experiences and practices of language teachers who implement the New South Wales (NSW) mandated language curriculum and, where possible, create opportunities for adjustments to language syllabi for greater awareness of diversity and plurilingualism. Data was gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with four high-school language teachers at independent schools in NSW, Australia. The interview addressed teachers' proficiency and knowledge of subject matter, their views of the (im)possibilities of the NSW language curriculum for developing plurilingual learners, and perceived challenges that appear to prevent multi/plurilingualism from being at the forefront of Australian language education. Findings revealed that despite teachers' strong commitment to languages education, they feel discouraged about the limited focus at national and State government levels on consistent and systematic multilingual education. This not only diminishes every effort made by teachers to transform pedagogies for pedagogies for multilingualism but also legitimises a dominant underlying rhetoric of monolingualism that does not adhere to the principles of educating for democratic citizenship.

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## Introduction

It is an undeniable and unquestionable fact that contemporary Australia has become increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD). Like many other developed societies, Australia has 'significant numbers of recently arrived and established immigrants within its population' (Hammond 2014, 507) who have a common dream and motivation – that of finding a better place to live (Debnár 2016). These communities contribute to the uniquely rich social, cultural, and linguistic makeup of Australian society. This diversity is reflected in all spheres of life. In education, for instance, recent data show that in New South Wales (NSW,) over 300,000 students (37.2%) enrolled in NSW government schools come from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) (NSW Department of Education 2021).

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Looking more broadly at the language education and curriculum context in Australia, we can observe that despite much effort in increasing and reshaping language education in Australian schools, limited success has been achieved (Liddicoat et al. 2003). Liddicoat and Scarino (2010) argued that ‘there has been a significant erosion of the position of languages in Australian school education’ (2), which have perpetuated the long-standing limited effect of language policy on language learning in schools. That is, language policy in Australia has steered away from the promotion of multilingualism since Liddicoat and Scarino’s (2010) critique over a decade ago, gearing more towards language xenophobic monolingualism. Indeed, Fielding (2022) lamented the neoliberal, monolingual language policy in Australia that is driven by immediate economic value rather than long-term intercultural benefits. As Lanvers, Thompson, and East (2021) rightly pinpointed, this neoliberal, top-down Anglophone agenda has had a considerable impact at various levels, mainly on language learning participation, language teacher supply, teacher preparation for language education, and several other complex systemic and epistemic issues that do not support the overall purpose of language education as a way of establishing social cohesion and tolerance in a pluralistic society (Liddicoat et al. 2003). It is worth noting that the erosion of language education in Australia extends across all levels of the school system, with a particularly notable impact in secondary school settings – an issue that is compounded by a significantly severe (languages) teacher shortage in Australia and beyond.

In a research study commissioned by the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC), it was revealed that while support for language education is strongly advocated by parents, teachers and the wider community, there are significant barriers to the successful implementation of language education programmes (ACSSO & APC 2007). Some of these include eurocentric ideology that drives monolingual policy, lack of incentive programmes to retain language teachers in schools, too few qualified language teachers to guarantee delivery of quality programmes, too little time allocated to language learning, lack of continuity of language study, among several others (Fielding 2022). One of the consequences of this has been the increasing decline in languages studies in not only Australia but across many English-speaking countries (Stein-Smith 2019). Liddicoat and Scarino (2010) concurred with this by adding that in Australia not only have enrolments in language study decreased but also the overall number of languages taught at the tertiary level.

Another barrier to success in language education programmes in schools is that, with English being a de-facto twenty-first-century asset, coupled with the absence of a language policy in Australia, there is a persistent risk of framing language education through a monolingual lens (Fielding 2022; Lanvers, Thompson, and East 2021). Liddicoat, Scarino, and Kohler (2018) stressed the complexity of language learning in that ‘it is seen as less integral to the overall curriculum ... [and] it is enmeshed within an ideological framing of education as a monolingual endeavour’ (4). In an increasingly diverse, multicultural, and multilingual world, it becomes inappropriate or irrelevant to think of language, language learning and pedagogy through the lens of monolingual conceptualizations. While Lo Bianco (2014) points out that multilingualism has been, for the most part, naturalised as an ordinary dimension of life, there are still well-established practices and deep-seated beliefs that continue to reinforce pedagogies predicated on a monolingual dogma. According to McNamara and Elder (2010), one of the main complications facing language education concerns the frameworks and scales that have dominated how languages are viewed, assessed and understood. Regrettably, the perpetuating monolingual mindset that downplays multilingualism from the top-down government policymaking, coupled with ill-fitting exam drilling and insufficient time for language learning, has led to a vicious cycle, wherein parents and students perceive ‘languages to be irrelevant, boring, and/or ‘for the brainy’ only’ (Lanvers 2020, 572). Teachers, nonetheless, are central to addressing these issues as they are ‘professionals who are uniquely positioned to lead transformation by designing instruction in ways that resist coercive power relations’ (Prasad and Lory 2020, 799).

In response to this complex environment, this study contributes to a growing body of literature on multilingualism that not only embraces the cultural and linguistic capital of students but also,

most importantly, challenges and disrupts deficit perspectives on language teaching and learning. Through the lens of critical multilingual language awareness (CMLA), this study critically examines the experiences and pedagogical practice of secondary school language teachers in NSW, Australia, for multilingual practice. In contexts highly constrained by several socio-political and institutional challenges, we unpack teachers' perceived barriers to developing multi/plurilingual learners and explore teachers' instantiations of CMLA through examples of pedagogical translanguaging practice.

### Critical multilingual language awareness

Given the multicultural/lingual nature of Australian schooling, teachers' critical awareness of learners with CaLD backgrounds is integral to their teaching practice and student learning (García 2016; Hedman and Fisher 2022). The fact that our CaLD learners, be they migrant or heritage speakers, speak English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) – a term widely used in the Australian curriculum – rather than a second language (ESL) highlights the relevance of multi/plurilingual pedagogy in language education in Australia. While this 'multi/plurilingual' awareness and understanding is not new, enacting it in actual classroom practice still begs the question. For instance, the traditional *language awareness* (LA) model only requires teachers to demonstrate the 'knowledge of (proficiency)' and 'knowledge about (subject matter)' the target language (e.g. English grammar) through 'pedagogical practice' (e.g. classroom interaction) (García 2016). Given this language-driven approach, learners' rich repertoires inherited from their home language or/and additional languages other than English (LOTE) are either overlooked or seen as an 'interference' with the dominant language taught at school (García 2016). This monolingual, English imperial model not only fails to acknowledge and embrace the rich linguistic diversity that CaLD learners bring to the class but also perpetuates the deficit model that focuses narrowly on the target language itself at the expense of legitimising multi/plurilingualism (Deroo and Ponzio 2023). In other words, the LA focus placed only on the standard norms of using the target language ignores or even worse devalues learners' home languages, thus sidelining their practices and creating injustice in class (Manan and David 2021).

Evidently, this traditional monolingual model condones the inherent monolingual bias fuelled by the dominance of Eurocentric ideology in language pedagogy (Hélot et al. 2018). Advancing this argument, Clark et al. (1990, 1991; in García 2016) proposed shaping the traditional LA model into a critical language awareness (CLA) one. CLA acknowledges and recognises the unequal power structure of the dominant (promotion and legitimisation of the target language) that is deemed superior to the marginalised (learners' home languages being suppressed) (Deroo and Ponzio 2023; Manan and David 2021). As such, CLA aims to transform the existing target language practices that have been dictated by the dominant societal ideologies and mainstream schooling. It encourages both the teacher and students to be more aware of this inherent language bias whilst restoring and re/co-constructing a more balanced classroom discourse (Hedman and Fisher 2022).

Taking a step further, García (2016) calls for teachers to move beyond focusing only on the target language itself and how it is delivered and take a CMLA lens to problematise monolingual ideologies that dominate language policymaking and fail to acknowledge the multilingual/cultural realness manifested in our plurilingual/cultural society and schooling (Manan and David 2021). She further posits that:

Besides becoming aware of plurilingualism and developing linguistic tolerance for multilingual citizens, and understanding ways of redressing the historical oppression of certain groups, a true multilingual awareness project for the twenty-first century would also develop in all teachers a critical understanding of how language use in society has been naturalized. (García 2016, 6)

From a CMLA perspective, language teachers may become more aware of dominant racializing language ideologies that not only perpetuate deficit perspectives of language learners but also

dominant discourses around the role and status of language and language learning in society (Flores & Rosa, 2015). With an enhanced sense of CMLA, language teachers should advocate for CaLD learners to reclaim the legitimacy of their colourful linguistic diversity and rich repertoires that should be equitably recognised in language education and pedagogically incorporated in teaching practices (Deroo and Ponzio 2023; Manan and David 2021). Teachers adopting the CMLA approach should also understand that ‘language is socially created, and thus, socially changeable to give voice and educate all students equitably’ (García 2016, 6). They would democratise rather than the ostracise inclusion of multilingual understandings, discussions, and practices in a CMLA class. Language itself is no longer the sole focus, but instead, it is how language learners can feel empowered and take agency in language practice (be it a target or additional languages) that really matters (Neary 2022). One of the highlights is crystallised in a socially (co)constructed class where ‘translanguaging’ is validated and promoted as a viable learning mechanism to help multilingual learners creatively and critically express their thoughts and voices (Cenoz and Gorter 2020; Hedman and Fisher 2022; Turner and Lin 2020). Teachers should be well-equipped to tap into the plurilingual resources and backgrounds of their students, whilst endeavouring to transform the imbalanced power structure and restore social justice (Manan and David 2021). This sets CMLA apart from the previous LA and CLA models as CMLA is more geared towards critical, democratic and inclusive multicultural/lingual education that can better mirror our world, which is increasingly diverse, complex and even troubled.

Closely aligned with the decolonising premises on which CMLA is founded is the notion of translanguaging. Zhang-Wu and Tian (2023) argued that in response to the dominant monolingual ideologies and policies within education and society at large, translanguaging represents a concerted pedagogical attempt to foster culturally diverse contexts of learning. Additionally, from a translanguaging lens, ‘racialized multilingual individuals are in a position of equality relative to dominant language speakers and they are seen as agentive, creative and critical language users’ (Zhang-Wu and Tian 2023, 377). Hence, disrupting binary, monolingual, dominant hierarchies in language learning is the nexus of translanguaging pedagogy, and the language classroom plays an integral role in harnessing and validating the multilingual resources, background knowledge, and cultural heritage of learners as a whole (Turner and Lin 2020).

In our study, we draw on the interconnected principles of CMLA and translanguaging as pedagogy – pedagogical translanguaging – to engage in a critical examination of the experiences and pedagogical practice of secondary school language teachers who navigate a complex and challenging landscape of dominant discourses and practices that legitimize a monolingual outlook on languages, languages learning and teachers.

## **Pedagogical translanguaging**

Plurilinguals use the resources of their linguistic repertoire and spontaneously translanguage. Spontaneous translanguaging most often takes place in multilingual settings and bilingual communities. García (2009) argues that translanguaging cannot be avoided in bilingual communities where most communication exchanges take place amongst multilinguals. Spontaneous translanguaging can also take place inside the classroom and can, therefore, be used pedagogically by teachers. Pedagogical translanguaging goes beyond accepting or promoting the flexible use of plurilinguals’ languages (Cenoz and Gorter 2020; 2022a; 2022b). It is defined as ‘planned by the teacher inside the classroom and can refer to the use of different languages for input and output or to other planned strategies based on the use of students’ resources from the whole linguistic repertoire’ (Cenoz 2017, 194). In other words, pedagogical translanguaging must be understood as intentional strategies of pedagogical practice that take into consideration the whole linguistic repertoire of multilingual learners (Cenoz and Gorter 2022a; 2022b).

One of the overarching goals of pedagogical translanguaging is to enhance multilingual speakers’ metalinguistic awareness. Understood as the ability to focus on language, think abstractly about it,

'play with it' and manipulate it (Jessner 2006; Veliz 2021), metalinguistic awareness – through effective pedagogical translanguaging strategies and optimal use of multilinguals' repertoires – is central to enhanced levels of multilingual competence. As a theoretical and pedagogical approach, pedagogical translanguaging is grounded in principles of language and language learning that foster the development of multilingualism. Some of these principles include reliance upon students' prior knowledge, the use of scaffolding and connected growers (Cenoz and Gorter 2022a). Given that learners are placed at the centre of instruction, prior knowledge is central to pedagogical translanguaging as it takes into account the social, cultural and linguistic resources that students bring to the classroom so that they can be integrated and exploited in planned pedagogical strategies. As for scaffolding in multilingual classrooms, translanguaging acts as a flexible and transitional scaffold that affords learners with a mediational tool to bridge 'home and school languages' (Duarte 2020). The concept of connected growers refers to the relationships that occur across each component of the linguistic system such as reading comprehension and vocabulary, and the ways in which these support each other to enhance comprehension or vocabulary growth (Cenoz and Gorter 2022a).

While further applied research on pedagogical translanguaging is yet to be undertaken, the pedagogical benefits of translanguaging as both spontaneous and planned activities in classroom settings are well documented (Cenoz and Gorter 2020; Duarte 2020; García 2009; García and Wei 2014; García, Johnson, and Seltzer 2017). For example, Cenoz, Santos, and Gorter (2022) reported that when teachers employ pedagogical translanguaging strategies or allow for translanguaging occurring in a language class; it reduces learners' anxiety, boosts their confidence and enables them to express themselves more freely. In another study, Orcasitas-Vicandi and Perales-Fernández-de-Gamboa (2024) report the findings of an investigation through which 117 preservice teachers were trained to deliver pedagogical translanguaging. Preservice teachers reported significant benefits, which included recognition and protection of minority languages in the classroom, opportunities for speakers to modify their socio-cultural identities, flexibility for students to rely on lexical knowledge of previously learned languages to construct complex sentences, and greater ability to transfer knowledge across languages. This is a step closer to an intercultural stance that 'incorporate[s] multilingual identity with language learners positioned as emerging multilinguals in the language classroom' (Fielding 2021, 466).

## Research motivation

There are several motivating factors underpinning this study. First and foremost, the prevalent social and political rhetoric on diversity and inclusion in Australia does not appear to keep up with the ever-changing and evolving cultural and linguistic makeup of our Australian society. Secondly, it must be acknowledged that there has been a significant erosion of the position of languages in Australian school education from the strongly articulated position of the mid-1980s in which linguistic and cultural diversity were placed at the forefront of issues of both national identity and language education (Scarino and Papademetre 2001). Another important element that drives this study is the differing position of languages in primary and secondary schools across jurisdictions in Australia. Unlike Victoria and Western Australia where languages are mandated at primary levels, in NSW, this is not the case. Hence, due to this unfortunate reality, we wished to develop an understanding of how language teachers position themselves in a context of many constraints and of the perceived affordances and impossibilities of the NSW language syllabus to develop language communication. Lastly, our anecdotal experience as teachers and language teacher educators involved in classroom-based research has ratified our assumptions about language teachers not possessing adequate levels of pedagogical knowledge or skills to deliver language practice. In response to this complex environment of language education in NSW, and Australia more broadly, the following guiding research questions have emerged:



1. *What are the experiences, views, and practices of high-school language teachers in enacting the NSW language curriculum through the lens of critical multilingual language awareness?*
2. *What are the challenges and opportunities in building a multi/plurilingual learning environment vis-a-vis the mandated curriculum through the lens of critical multilingual language awareness?*

## Languages education in NSW

In addition to the above-mentioned contexts that backgrounds the reasons for this study, it is important to position the role and status of languages in the NSW Languages syllabus. Unlike other Australian jurisdictions (e.g. Western Australia), language studies are not mandatory during primary education in NSW. The study of languages for Early Stage 1 (Kindergarten) to Stage 3 (Years 5–6) is optional. Through consultation with staff and the community, individual primary schools may decide to deliver a language programme. In Stage 4 (Years 7–8), secondary schools are required to deliver 100 hours of one language in one continuous 12-month period (NESA, 2022). In most NSW schools, this is delivered in Year 8. As high-school students progress further into higher year levels, the study of languages becomes optional again and made an elective subject for students. While the availability and compulsory nature of 100 hours of language study may seem reasonable for a country that does not have a national language policy, it has been a matter of heated debate and ongoing discussions about the erosion of language education in NSW, and in Australia more broadly. Due to much of the contention around the inefficient mandatory number of hours of language study and the lack of continuity it provides, it is our view that the NSW language syllabus is simplistic and tokenistic as it does not fully embrace the cultural and linguistic diverse makeup of our society, nor does it provide students with access to quality language learning experiences.

## The study

The current study is based on an interpretive research paradigm. It is shaped by human experiences and social contexts (ontology) and accommodates the subjective interpretations of the participants (epistemology). Interpretive research explores the social reality that is embedded within a social setting. Thus, this interpretivist approach relies on data-gathering methods including interviews, as this method provides an appropriate dialogue between researchers and participants to (co)create a meaningful reality (Cohen and Crabtree 2006). To explore this ‘meaningful reality’, in-depth semi-structured interviews were administered to participating teachers in the study. Six open-ended questions were formulated to prompt discussion and open dialogue about their experiences as language teachers, their perceived preparedness and knowledge of the ‘subject matter’ and of language teaching pedagogies, the challenges to implementing a language syllabus, and examples of practice that illustrated teachers’ reliance upon the students’ cultural and linguistic repertoires. The semi-structured nature of interviews provided opportunities for impromptu questions that helped further unpack teachers’ responses.

Participants in this study were recruited mainly through leaders in independent (non-government) schools; principals, deputy principals and assistant principals who assisted with disseminating among secondary languages teachers in their schools an electronic ‘call for participation’ flyer. Interview data from four teachers is reported in this study. [Table 1](#).

As alluded to earlier, participants were working at independent schools (non-government) at the time of the interviews. Independent schools, according to the Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales [AISNSW] (2023), comprise a diverse and growing group of non-government schools with diverse religious and philosophical approaches to teaching. While they are regulated by the State governing authority, independent schools are predominantly accountable to parents and the community from whom most of the funding is sourced (AISNSW 2023). While all schools in NSW are required to employ fully qualified and accredited teachers, the considerable deficit in the

**Table 1.** Teachers' profile.

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Language taught	Language teaching credentials
Jane	28	Chinese	Nil
Elisha	32	Bahasa Indonesian	Nil
Josh	30	Japanese	Japanese Studies (Introductory)
Aaron	34	Chinese (Mandarin)	Languages Teaching Unit

availability of teachers across the curriculum, including language teachers, has resulted in schools either discontinuing language programmes entirely or resorting to language teachers who do not necessarily possess significant qualifications in the field.

Interview data from participants underwent several stages of analysis. First, all interviews were listened to in full several times by the researchers and transcribed in full. Reading the interview transcripts repeatedly helped determine the major themes that were worth exploring in depth. Fragments of interview transcripts were then coded and labelled into categories which led to the identification of three major themes. Themes along with their representative excerpts from the coded categories were reviewed, discussed and refined by both researchers. In particular, the analytical approach used in this study followed Nowell et al.'s (2017) six steps to establishing trustworthiness during thematic analysis: familiarise with data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define/name themes, and produce a final report.

It is worth noting that the qualitative findings of this study should not be generalised beyond the specific school contexts in which the teachers operate. Each educational setting possesses unique characteristics and dynamics that can significantly influence teaching practices and experiences.

## Findings and discussion

### *Proficiency and knowledge of subject matter for multilingual education*

When asked about their language experiences, and preparedness for the subject matter knowledge and language teaching pedagogies, the four teacher participants navigated the resources and development of language repertoire through cross-cultural awareness, life experiences and academic pursuits. In general, teachers felt culturally and pedagogically disadvantaged at not possessing either a certain level of proficiency, a language teaching credential or both, which interfered with their developing multilingual identities and effectiveness as multilingual teachers (Fielding 2021). Josh, for example, indicated that:

Even though Japanese is not a problem for me, I feel I need more training for teaching and knowledge about teaching in multilingual contexts. This lack of knowledge about teaching Japanese language impacts my confidence and identity as a language teacher and surely my students.

One critical aspect highlighted in Josh's observation is the significance of understanding teaching methodologies and strategies tailored to diverse linguistic backgrounds. Teaching a language goes beyond mere linguistic proficiency; it requires a critical awareness of the socio-cultural contexts in which language learning takes place (Hedman and Fisher 2022). Multilingual contexts present unique challenges and opportunities that necessitate specialised training to effectively address the needs of students from diverse language backgrounds. Josh's acknowledgment of his lack of knowledge in teaching the Japanese language within multilingual contexts points to a broader issue of systemic inadequacies in language teacher education programmes. Therefore, it highlights the importance of integrating CLA components into teacher training curricula to equip educators with the necessary skills and perspectives to navigate linguistic diversity effectively.

Despite the reported 'lack of knowledge about teaching Japanese', Josh added that '*I am of Japanese descent, I speak Japanese as my first language, English is my second language ... , but I had to go through of process of awareness of how the Japanese language works before I could teach it*'.



Interestingly, although heritage-speaking participants could use their home language to fast-track into the language teaching profession, they did not fall back on their heritage language repertoire that was acquired informally and incidentally. The sense of LA served as a drive to relearn the language pedagogies underpinned by second language research as in Josh's case as a Japanese heritage speaker.

For novice teachers or teachers who do not hold a language teaching certificate in particular, they resorted to their overseas living and/or travelling experiences where they could 'pick up' the target language on the go and above all, practice it spontaneously with the locals in the target country. Their sense of cross-cultural and metalinguistic awareness enabled them to acquire the language more effectively in the host country. This is particularly the case in Elisha's experience as an Indonesian language teacher:

I would consider myself a well-travelled person, not fully bilingual, but proficient in Bahasa, with a mixed identity, and because of my love of languages, especially Indonesian, and passion for travelling and talking to people on the streets and in different situations, but I need more, a bit of more of the formal stuff, the theory, the teaching approaches for language, but it's a national thing. It's because the country is not investing in languages.

Several interesting dimensions are worth highlighting in Elisha's response. First and foremost, it is evident that, despite the travel experiences that have fostered her love of languages and proficiency in Bahasa Indonesia, Elisha's assumptions about language and language learning appear to be heavily influenced by monoglossic ideologies (Slaughter and Cross 2021) and colonial logics of linguistic deficiencies, which prevent her from seeing herself as bilingual. Secondly, the call for 'formal stuff', alluding to an enhanced understanding and awareness of theory-informed practice, is of great interest as it is connected with a broader problem around 'not investing in languages' at a national level in Australia (Liddicoat and Scarino 2010; Liddicoat, Scarino, and Kohler 2018).

Inadequate training in multilingual teaching contexts may contribute to feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, impacting the teacher's professional identity and sense of efficacy. These sentiments can, in turn, influence the classroom dynamics and students' learning experiences. For Jane, a Chinese teacher with no formal language teaching qualification, having rich life linguistic experiences, has been vital to develop a more critical stance on languages and language teaching, yet not sufficient to take pride in her confidence to teach Chinese or professional identity as a Chinese teacher.

For me, enacting the NSW language curriculum successfully depends on having well prepared teachers, with the knowledge, the skills, the language, the qualifications, and an established identity because life experience is not enough. We need to be able to see and understand the curriculum, the language policies, what principals say, what politicians think, and so on. I have no Chinese teaching qualification, and my school asked me to teach Chinese, so it's kind of incorrect because I can probably teach some Chinese but don't know the language policies, or things like that.

Despite holding no formal teaching qualification, her life as a missionary in China allowed her to be fully immersed in and exposed to the Chinese-speaking environment. Jane's offshore living experience was viewed by her school as evidence to demonstrate her knowledge and understanding of Chinese in lieu of 'an accredited language teaching qualification'. This reflects the aftermaths of the nation-wide language teacher shortage, much less recruiting qualified language teachers as a result of the normative language policy in Australia that still views LOTE teaching and learning as peripheral to monolingual mainstream education (Liddicoat and Scarino 2010; Stein-Smith 2019). Sadly, this is an epitome of how language education is valued (less) and operated (loosely) Down Under – no language teacher training or/and qualification is required in LOTE compared with its mainstream subject counterparts. Moreover, Jane asserts that life experience alone is insufficient for effective teaching, indicating recognition of the complexities inherent in language education. This capitalises on a critical aspect of language education – the necessity for educators to possess not only proficiency in the target language but also an understanding of language policies,

educational frameworks, and broader socio-political contexts, which ties closely in with the main tenets of CMLA.

Notably, Jane also commented that not being fully proficient in Chinese makes her feel ‘impaired’ in some ways but also incapable of fully impacting her students’ language learning.

I’d like to have a formal qualification to teach Chinese and also develop my full proficiency further. I’m kind of impaired by not having the pedagogical training for teaching language, which, despite the fact I’m trying to do a great job, is having an impact on my students’ learning.

The interconnectedness of formal (language) teaching preparation and students’ learning is acknowledged by Jane, who highlights the importance of obtaining a language teaching qualification to not only enhance her proficiency but also, most importantly, improve her effectiveness as a teacher. This suggests that it is critical for multilingual teachers and educators to possess the knowledge, skills, and pedagogical preparedness to effectively respond to the diverse social, cultural and linguistic needs of students and their contexts.

For other participants, they sought formal training to upskill and enrich their knowledge of subject matters and understanding of language pedagogies as opposed to relying fully on ‘informal’ living and travelling experiences. For example, Aaron, the novice with only one-year of teaching experience, did not feel confident to teach Chinese without further training. Taking initiative, he was able to ask the school to sponsor his professional learning in language teaching methodologies so that he could feel more equipped to teach the target language:

When I was asked to teach Mandarin, I asked the school if they would pay for a ‘languages teaching unit’ at a university, and they agreed to it. Although it was not an entire course, the unit helped me a lot to develop skills and confidence to teach language in a range of contexts. I wanted to learn more, more about languages, how language works, the role in our society, diversity, and the pedagogies for it to become a better teacher.

García (2016) stressed the importance of CMLA as an avenue to make teachers not only ‘recognize the linguistic diversity of children and communities but also to question the concept of language itself, as legitimized in schools’ (1). From a CMLA perspective, the importance of furthering his knowledge and preparation for language teaching is clear since Aaron wishes to deepen his understanding of language itself, and its connection with diversity, as enablers for more effective pedagogical practice for multilingual education. Furthermore, Aaron understands that language is not just a set of conventional rules but meanings that carry values and ideologies that frame our understanding of language and language learning.

... and I also want to learn more because with a better understanding of language and how to teach it, I can critique the underlying ideas about language that come from society and politics, and help my students also become more critical thinkers and realize that language is much more than sounds.

Besides a clear commitment to ongoing learning and professional development as essential components of effective language teaching, Aaron’s aspiration to critique underlying societal and political ideas about language reveals the importance of CLA (Farias 2005) in multilingual education (García 2016). Language is not merely a means of communication but a social construct intertwined with power dynamics, cultural norms, and identity formation. By interrogating the implicit assumptions and biases embedded within language ideologies, educators can foster a more nuanced understanding of language among their students. Alim (2005; 2010) explained that CLA as a framework and pedagogy seeks to engage teachers, students and educators in a critical examination of issues around language used to maintain, perpetuate, resist and confront existing power relations. From a CMLA lens, developing or possessing a critical awareness of multilingualism involves the capacity to appreciate linguistic tolerance and its potential for democratic citizenship (García 2016).

In conclusion, despite the differences in languages taught (Chinese, Japanese, Bahasa Indonesia) and teaching qualifications (none to an accredited graduate certificate), these teacher participants share a common value that the sense of LA is pivotal to their profession in that teachers need to

possess the competency and knowledge of the target language taught in class (García 2016; Hélot et al. 2018). In addition, teachers' desire and aspiration to further their professional and pedagogical knowledge and skills was also motivated by a strong commitment to improving their effectiveness as teachers and impacting their students' learning. In line with the principles of CMLA, it was also evident that teachers' need and call for formal language teaching preparation is also required for developing a more critical perspective on the situatedness of language at the intersection of social and political influences on multilingual education. As such, there was recognition by the teachers that their pedagogical practice for multilingual contexts is confounded by social, political and ideological influences on their understandings of language, language teaching and learning, of which they do not always have awareness.

### ***(Im)possibilities of the NSW language curriculum***

Teachers' experiences and practices for multilingual education are not only influenced, and to a certain extent hampered, by their insufficient language proficiency and formal training but also by broader structural, systemic issues that play a vital role in enabling or constraining avenues for multilingual education, an appreciation for diversity, social justice and plurilingualism. To this end, besides perceiving the primacy of linguistic and content knowledge of the target language, the teacher participants also critically reflected on what is not working in the mandated NSW curriculum by raising their CMLA. For example, Aaron expressed his frustration about the lack of sufficient hours put in place to better support his multilingual students in class: *'Well, clearly the number of hours is not enough to instil a love for language or to develop bilingual or multilingual learners. 100 hrs of language study are just not sufficient'* (Aaron). Aaron's frustration was further shared by Elisha that the limited contact hours in language instruction *'... ha[ve] a big impact on uptake and continuation of foreign languages, which is left to the student'* (Elisha). Similarly, Jane also pinpointed how the current language policy that sidelines language education, at least in the Eastern States such as NSW, has failed to prepare Australian students to develop metalinguistic awareness, target language proficiency, and cross-cultural understanding in a multilingual/cultural country like Australia: *'We will never get students to achieve a reasonable level of proficiency or even a decent level of language and cultural awareness in a diverse country if languages are not made compulsory in K-6'* (Jane).

Indeed, the broken system nationwide is further verified by our teacher participants, as exasperated by Josh, the Japanese language teacher that *'... there's a lack of professional development programs and network opportunities, coupled with all sorts of issues around funding that results in massive shortages of qualified language teachers'* (Josh). Language education, despite unsupported and marginalised by the government, has been embraced and advocated by the stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and multicultural communities. For example, Aaron, the Chinese language teacher, expressed his view about why LOTE should be promoted and included in curriculum planning vis-a-vis the limited contact hours given for language practice and support:

I have some serious concerns about the lack of continuity, if any, around language or languages learning from primary to secondary. There should be more language immersion programs for primary students, or room in the curriculum for acknowledging and promoting heritage languages.

This concrete suggestion is also shared by Josh that *'... one of the greatest flaws with the curriculum is that 'tasters' of language are introduced too late, and only very superficially. There needs to be more immersion, and earlier exposure'* (Josh). Again, this public outcry voiced by the teachers in the study only exposes the long-standing systemic issues and barriers in promoting language education, making it even harder to build social cohesion and inclusion in a multilingual/cultural society.

Unanimously, the teacher participants also identified the challenges facing them in implementing a language syllabus in class. They all pointed out that the systemic issues, triggered by the monolingual hegemony, have done not only a disservice to language education that is disproportionately

represented in mainstream curriculum but also injustice to multilingual/cultural communities. As articulated by Elisha, the teacher of Bahasa Indonesian:

I see challenges at a system level. I mean, we have school leaders in our school system who don't speak languages other than English. It's mostly 'white', Anglo, Caucasian leadership that dominates our school system. This should really be the place to start to make real change in the languages environment in our schools.

Elisha's vivid verbatim pinpoints that current mainstream schooling is another replica of Eurocentric and English imperialism Down Under. The repercussion of the top-down, monolingual approach to language education and curriculum policy means that

languages are treated as a separate thing, which are not embedded or supported across the curriculum. Students who speak a language other English are not fully integrated into our practices whereas they could be useful resources in language classes to help other students, or even the teacher.

Here, we see teacher participants' sense of CMLA and advocacy for multilingualism emerging (García 2016; Hedman and Fisher 2022). They started to critically problematise how their CMLA and acknowledgement of learners' CaLD repertoires were hampered by the hegemonic national language policy (Deroo and Ponzio 2023; Hélot et al. 2018). Lamenting the lack of inclusion and diversity in and outside of the class, Jane put forth her CMLA against the dominance of Eurocentric ideology in language pedagogy:

One great challenge is the lack of State policy on language and language diversity. We need these to flourish, and for that to occur all different stakeholders need to see and understand the value and benefits of learning and maintaining languages and language diversity.

(Un)surprisingly, these concerns voiced by our teacher participants in exasperation also echo Liddicoat and Scarino's (2010) call for reforming the long overlooked, broken language education system Down Under that was already made a decade ago: 'there has been a significant erosion of the position of languages in Australian school education' (2). As the cornerstone of Australia is built upon multilingual/cultural communities (Hammond 2014), it is ironic to note that plurilingualism is still not celebrated and promoted, but instead being silenced and elbowed aside by the hegemony of monolingualism. Unfortunately, this eurocentric ideology has made the language policy skewed towards monolingual education on the national level at expense of plurilingual education (McNamara and Elder 2010). Due to the lack of support and incentives, we see dwindling programmes established for LOTE teacher preparation, coupled with the national shortage of language teachers (much less qualified ones) (Liddicoat et al. 2003; Stein-Smith 2019).

### Reimagining teachers' pedagogies of translanguaging

Despite the constraints set by the NSW language curriculum, the teacher participants channelled their CMLA into creating plurilingual inclusive learning environments and advocating for their CaLD students in class (Meier 2017). When asked to provide examples of enacting plurilingualism in their languages class, all the teachers illustrated how they promoted and incorporated students' multilingual/cultural repertoires in language pedagogies (Conteh and Meier 2014; May 2013). For instance, Josh offered a concrete example of tapping into his heritage language learners and how this 'translanguaging pedagogy' leveraged the resources to benefit both multilingual and monolingual students alike:

... even though English-only is pretty much the norm in mainstream classes, I feel that students feel more relaxed and confident learning another language [Japanese] and about the language when their linguistic knowledge is taken into account. I would allow for explanations or definitions to be given in their home language or complex terms to be explicated in their first language.

Josh's acknowledgment that English holds the status quo in mainstream classes is tempered by an awareness of the benefits of embracing students' plurilingual repertoires. In this language class, the teacher adopts translanguaging strategies that honour and leverage students' linguistic knowledge.

Similarly, Aaron shared how he ‘leverage[d] the language knowledge of multilingual kids ... to pair them up with monolingual children or designate specific tasks where they could make a specific contribution to completing it’. By making language learning more inclusive and plurilingual, he enabled both multilingual and monolingual student cohorts to activate background knowledge, make connections and comparisons, and raise multilingual/cultural awareness, as illustrated in Aaron’s further exemplification to:

... create opportunities for dialogue and critical discussion in class through which students can become more aware of their own and others’ languages. I would practically do this by asking students to think and share with the class how certain things are done in their cultures ... how do I apologise in my language? How do I order something? If I am mad at someone, what do I say in my language? And things like that. It’s fun and lots of learning.

Aaron’s comment exemplifies a pedagogical approach that values and integrates students’ plurilingual repertoires and pragmatic knowledge systems. By creating opportunities for dialogue and critical discussion in the classroom, the teacher encourages students to explore and reflect on their own and others’ languages. This not only fosters a deeper understanding of linguistic diversity but also promotes a more inclusive environment where students’ cultural and linguistic identities are affirmed (Fielding 2021).

Another case in point is how Jane drew upon her CMLA and placed her heritage language learners at heart when planning lessons and developing multiculturally and purilinguistically responsive activities, thereby celebrating the rich repertoires brought by the CaLD students and advocating for inclusive language education (Cenoz 2017; García 2009):

During my planning phase, I try to think about when and where in a lesson I can fall back on my bilingual students’ prior knowledge of language and culture. So, if we are talking about Japanese culture in class, I would ask students of Japanese background to talk about styles of communication, food or artistic activities. They would share this in class, and where possible bring family artifacts.

Indeed, instead of silencing or conforming to monolingual hegemony, these teachers put plurilingualism back on the map and even encouraged those heritage language learners to ‘teach’ their monolingual peers the cultural and linguistic knowledge that is indigenous to their home language (Cenoz and Gorter 2020; 2022a; 2022b). As such, those multilingual learners could feel empowered and even proud of being heritage speakers who can showcase their translinguaging capabilities in front of their counterparts and teacher (Cenoz 2017). For example, Elisha vividly recalled how she incorporated plurilingualism in her class by collaborating with her Indonesian heritage students to help ‘*reflect and identify a pattern, the position of words, ending of verbs ... model that with a text, and then ask the bilingual students to share their findings*’. To further elaborate on her teaching approach, Elisha illustrated that:

Generally, students in my [Indonesian] language classes would want to know more about the grammar of the language so that’s an opportunity for me to work in collaboration with the bilingual students in my class. Often, they would use lots of grammar structures as they communicate with their families but would not necessarily be able to explain them to someone else.

Collectively, we see these language teachers embracing, showcasing, and legitimising multilingualism in class, whilst enacting criticality, empathy, and social justice to challenge the status quo in monolingual language policy by bringing language ecology to the fore (García 2009; Meier 2017). Specifically, they tapped into pedagogical translinguaging and held up a safe space to allow their multilingual learners to creatively and flexibly draw upon their heritage language resources culturally and linguistically (Duarte 2020; Jessner 2006; Turner and Lin 2020) whilst raising metalinguistic awareness and build multilingual competence among students as a whole (Cenoz and Gorter 2022a). This paves the way for building inclusive pedagogy and plurilingualism in class, breaking down the monolingual boundaries confined by the Eurocentric language policy.

## Implications and conclusion

First and foremost, it must be noted that the qualitative results of this research study should be interpreted within the specific contexts of the schools under study, acknowledging the distinct characteristics and dynamics inherent to each educational environment.

Through the lens of CMLA, this study set out to critically examine the experiences and pedagogical practices of secondary school languages teachers regarding multi/plurilingualism in NSW, Australia. Besides ratifying what has already been documented about a narrow and inefficient NSW Languages syllabus (Liddicoat and Scarino 2010), we observed that most teachers, due to the absence of relevant language teaching qualifications, were faced with the complex pedagogical underpinnings of language teaching by drawing mainly upon their personal and life experiences rather than upon research-informed pedagogical knowledge of how languages are taught and learned. While some of these teachers may be typified as presumptuous or pedagogically underprepared, it is a phenomenon that endorses an ongoing tendency towards an appreciation of social reproduction theories that underestimate the value of the multilingual/cultural, heterogenous nature of our societies which, in turn, results in significant teacher shortages.

Despite the lack of academic training and qualifications, the teacher participants demonstrated a strong impetus for developing a critical understanding of language and its role in curriculum, policy and society at large. Some teachers' remarks highlighted the role of language teachers as agents of social change. By equipping students with the tools to critically analyse language and its societal implications, educators empower them to challenge dominant ideologies, advocate for linguistic justice, and participate more meaningfully in diverse linguistic communities, which was evidence of teachers' developmental traits of CMLA.

Furthermore, the teacher participants activated a CMLA approach to their language practices through critical reflection and action. As they narrated and reflected upon the barriers and challenges to fully embracing language diversity and enacting multi/plurilingual pedagogy, teachers not only voiced their own multilingual experiences but above all, showed advocacy towards what, in their view, needs significant change and transformation in current language teaching and learning in NSW to enable students to be more culturally and linguistically attuned, and develop soft skills to participate in a multi/plurilingual world. Nevertheless, teachers grapple with several systemic barriers to successful multi/plurilingual practice in secondary schools. Some of these include, as reported by teachers, lack of continuity of languages studies, limited number of hours for languages learning, languages being introduced 'too late', and a Eurocentric language syllabus that does not acknowledge or promote heritage languages. While these findings are by no means surprising in light of what is already known about the limitations of the NSW Languages syllabus and the absence of a national languages policy (Liddicoat and Scarino 2010; Scarino and Papademetre 2001), what appears to be a pressing concern for teachers is the unfair system of languages education based on a nation-wide monolingual regime (Prasad and Lory 2020). Teachers show critical awareness of and resistance against the dominance of monoglossic ideologies, which permeate through school practices and leadership mindsets.

Notwithstanding the systemic and epistemic barriers reported by teachers, pedagogical opportunities were sought and created to disrupt the monolingual bias in their classrooms through the advancement of teaching strategies aligned with the principles of pedagogical translanguaging. In recognition of the multilingual diversity of the world and the contentious encounters of diversity and inclusion, teachers unanimously take the so-called 'multilingual turn' (Conteh and Meier 2014; May 2013) to enact a more critically oriented movement towards viewing languages as 'a resource for learning and as associated with status and power' (Meier 2017, 131). The multilingual turn empowers these teachers to not only reject the 'monolingual bias' but also endeavour to 'break down boundaries between language education for so-called "minority" and "majority" language populations' (Meier 2017, 132), thus restoring the ecology of languages, learners, and language pedagogy in class. Through pedagogical translanguaging, teachers leveraged students' cultural



and linguistic resources by allowing students to (re)define or explain concepts in their home language, engaging them in dialogue about cultural and linguistic patterns and behaviours in their cultures, and creating learning opportunities for greater self-awareness.

Taken together, teachers are able to build a plurilingual learning environment and hold a safe space for heritage language learners to critically and creatively utilise their multilingual/cultural repertoires whilst helping their monolingual counterparts develop metalinguistic awareness and appreciation for language diversity and inclusion (Cenoz and Gorter 2022a; Duarte 2020; Jessner 2006). Indeed, every cloud has a silver lining – language teachers’ pushback on the inadequate language policy and monolingual ideology through CMAL raising and pedagogical translanguaging has verified this saying.

## Disclosure statement

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