


**Multilingualism and Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Examining
Language Ideology and Resulting Practices**

Kerstin M. Tönsing¹ and Gloria Soto²

¹Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication, University of Pretoria

²Department of Special Education and Department of Speech, Language and Hearing
Sciences, San Francisco State University

Author Note

Kerstin M. Tönsing  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1317-0474>

Gloria Soto  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3254-3099>

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Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Kerstin Tönsing;
kerstin.tonsing@up.ac.za

Abstract

Although the literature suggests that multilingual augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) interventions hold benefits for children from multilingual backgrounds, there is little guidance on how such interventions can be implemented. While various barriers to this process have been noted, language ideology has not received much attention in the AAC literature. This paper aims to highlight multilingualism as both a linguistic and a sociopolitical phenomenon. An awareness of the influence of language ideology on AAC practice may lead to more considered and reflective approaches when supporting multilingual clients and their families. A description of the multilingual experience is followed by a discussion of language ideologies and views of multilingualism and how these may translate into AAC practices. Through a series of questions, AAC practitioners are encouraged to reflect on the influence of language ideology on their practices. The influence of language ideology on the legal and policy context, service models, and family language practices and choices is then explored. By situating AAC interventions for children from multilingual backgrounds within a macrosystemic and ideological framework, researchers and practitioners may be able to identify not just constraints on but also opportunities for providing person- and family-centered intervention.

Keywords: Augmentative and alternative communication; Language ideology; Multilingualism

More than half of the world's population is multilingual (Grosjean, 2013; Kohnert, 2013). While multilingualism has been prevalent in many parts of the world for millennia (Mufwene, 2016), research and practice in the field of communication disorders does not reflect this demographic fact. Intervention studies have focused primarily on monolingual participants or participants using a dominant language. The evidence base for communication interventions for children from multilingual backgrounds is still limited (Paradis, 2016; Soto & Yu, 2014). Many multilingual children, including those who require augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) intervention, still routinely receive communication intervention in only one language (Jordaan, 2008; Kathard et al., 2011; Marinova-Todd et al., 2016; Soto & Yu, 2014). Reflective practitioners and researchers have increasingly questioned this state of affairs because a monolingual intervention approach may fail to recognize the sociolinguistic reality of persons from multilingual backgrounds and their families (Soto & Yu, 2014). This reality requires communicators to communicate in different languages, sometimes within one interaction. An integrated linguistic repertoire is therefore needed, including grammatical and semantic surface structures of both languages. Failing to support persons in need of AAC to build and develop such a repertoire may reduce communication opportunities, participation, and inclusion. Furthermore, an emerging body of evidence points to the benefits of supporting all of a child's languages through intervention (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016; Kohnert & Medina, 2009).

Implementing multilingual AAC intervention practices remains challenging. Various barriers have been identified in the literature, including (a) lack of available AAC systems that allow access to multiple languages (Soto & Yu, 2014), (b) systematic exclusion of so-called linguistic minority groups¹ from access to institutions providing AAC services, and (c) limited opportunities for multilingual education and intervention for persons in need of AAC

(McNamara, 2018). What may not have been overtly articulated is the influence that language ideology may have, directly or indirectly, on multilingual AAC practices.

Language ideologies are defined as “beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language structure and use that often index the political economic interests of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups, and nation states” (Kroskrity, 2010, p. 192). Valdés (2018) further notes that language ideologies are typically unexamined and are often accepted as common sense. However, language ideologies typically embody specific political and economic viewpoints and lead to specific ways of evaluating languages, language practice², and the speakers of those languages. These ideologies also underpin views of multilingualism and are closely linked to the way language itself is conceptualized. Language ideologies are more often described in the fields of linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics. AAC practitioners may be more familiar with conceptualizations of language from the fields of psycho- and neurolinguistics. However, language, and specifically multilingualism, is as much a linguistic as it is a sociopolitical phenomenon. Multilingual AAC practices could be enhanced by taking both the linguistic and sociopolitical aspects into consideration.

The aim of this paper is to situate AAC intervention for children from multilingual backgrounds within a framework of language ideology in order to understand its influence on AAC practice. In this paper, we propose that AAC practitioners should be aware of language ideologies for a number of reasons. First, what we as practitioners implicitly or explicitly think about language and multilingualism influences our intervention practice and the priorities we place on including home language(s) in our interventions. It influences the goals we aspire to when supporting persons from multilingual backgrounds and their families, and how we go about achieving them. Second, language ideologies have an indirect influence on our practices. They

influence, for example, the legal and policy context at national, regional, and institutional level regulating official language use and language use in education. Language ideologies also permeate professional preparation and what gets included and excluded from professional development curricula and research priorities. They may also underlie the way in which our service models are constructed. Finally, family language practices and choices are also shaped by language ideology and shape it in return.

The paper commences with a working definition of multilingualism and a description of variations in the multilingual experience. This section is followed by a brief overview of language ideologies underlying different conceptualizations of multilingualism and their possible implications for AAC intervention. AAC practitioners and researchers are then encouraged to consider the direct influence of language ideologies on their practices through reflective questions. Indirect influences are explored with reference to the United States' and the South African contexts. Finally, some suggestions for developing inclusive translingual AAC practices are given.

The Multilingual Experience

Multilingualism has been broadly defined as “the use of two or more languages...in everyday life” (Grosjean, 2013, p. 5). We will adopt this working definition as a point of departure. The multilingual experience differs between individuals globally on a number of variables such as the following: (a) age, degree, and context of language exposure; (b) level of proficiency attained in different languages; and (c) the sociolinguistic and political context in which languages are learnt and used. In addition, the language practices of a multilingual speaker would differ based on the interaction partners and contexts. For example, a speaker may draw flexibly on English, isiZulu, and Sepedi words in informal interactions with friends who share a

similar language background, while such language practices may not be preferred in an employment interview. The continuum of language ideologies described in the next section cannot be seen as separated from these differences in multilingual experience, as a dynamic interplay exists between language ideology and language practice (Blackledge & Creese, 2010). Even an individual speaker may move along a continuum of language practices associated with different language ideologies, depending on their language competence, the microcontext of the interaction, as well as the sociopolitical macrocontext.

Language Ideology: Conceptualizations of Language and Multilingualism and Implications for AAC Practice

Figure 1 provides a summary of some prevailing language ideologies and suggests how these ideologies translate into AAC practices. We present it with the caveat that it is by no means comprehensive and should be seen as a first attempt to relate language ideologies and AAC practices. Others may critique, elaborate, and build on it, or replace it with alternative conceptualizations.

Figure 1 illustrates that the conceptualization of language itself is the starting point of language ideology. A distinction is made between language as a system and language as practice. Ideologies associated with language as a system see language as an objective structured reality, with clearly delineated and distinguishable bounds, whereas ideologies relating to language as practice see language as fluid and socially constructed, with flexible and porous bounds (Lewis et al., 2012b). Conceptualizations of multilingualism associated with one or both of the two overarching positions are explained in their manifestation and ideological underpinnings. Here we draw on Jørgensen's "norms of human linguistic behavior" (2008, pp. 168-169). These conceptualizations have changed and evolved over time, from monolingual ideals, towards the

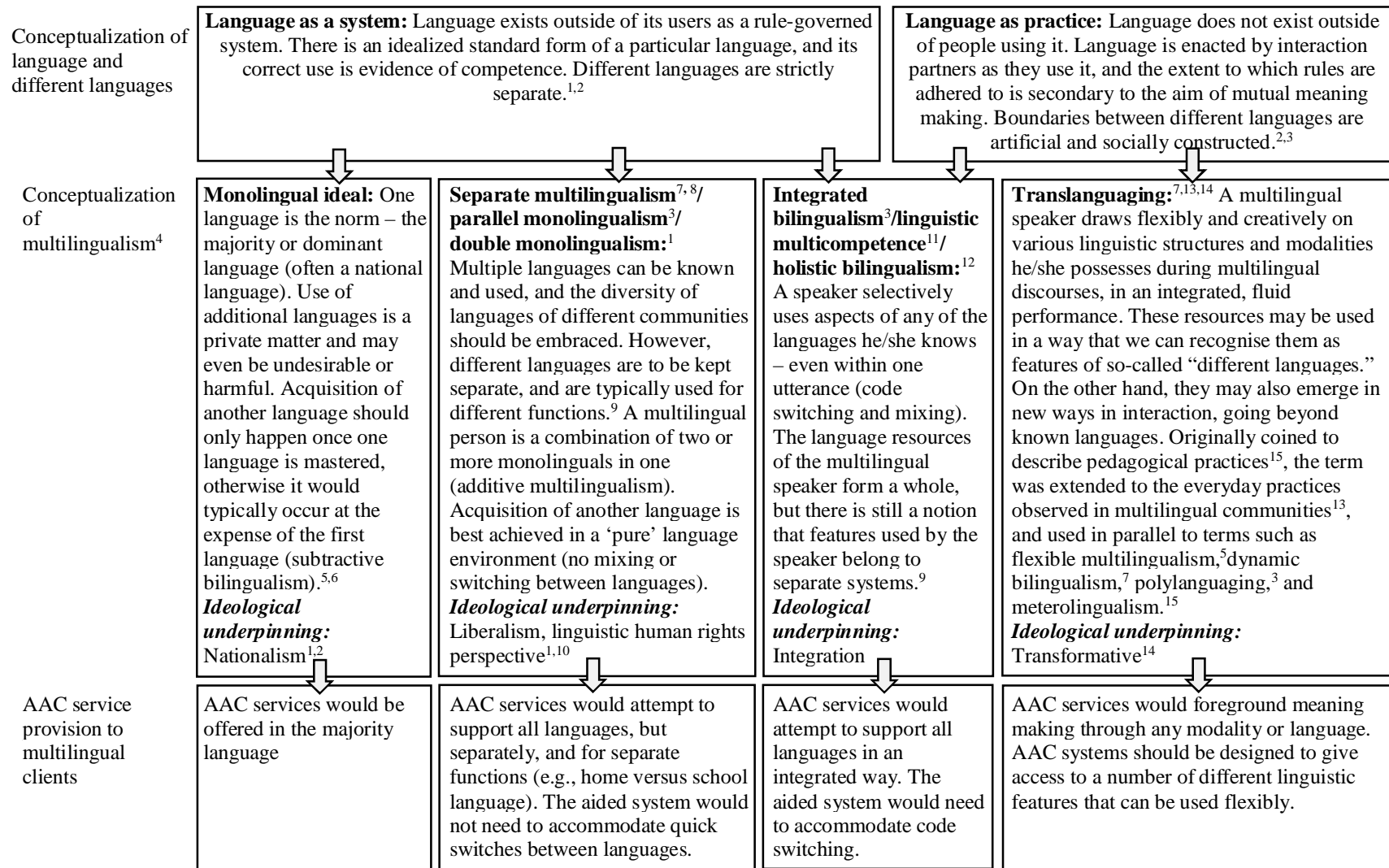


Figure 1. An overview of conceptualizations of language, multilingualism, and possible effects on AAC service provision. ¹Petrovic (2015); ²Wright (2015); ³Jørgensen (2008); ⁴As adapted from Jørgensen (2008; pp. 168-169) ⁵Lambert (1973); ⁶García & Sylvan (2011); ⁷Blackledge & Creese (2010); ⁸Zhang (2017); ⁹Lewis et al. (2012a); ¹⁰Skutnabb-Kangas (2008).¹¹Cook (2016); ¹²Grosjean (1985); ¹³Lewis et al. (2012b); ¹⁴Wei (2011); ¹⁵Otsuji & Pennycook (2010)

translingual conceptualization that is relatively recent. We also propose what different conceptualizations of multilingualism may mean for AAC practice.

Language as a System: From Monolingualism to Separate Multilingualism

When language is viewed as a system, it is presumed to be an objective phenomenon that exists outside of its users. A language like German or Spanish, for example, consists of a unique standardized set of static and relatively immutable features, including grammar, vocabulary, and spelling (Petrovic, 2015; Wright, 2015). Competence in a language is displayed when speakers conform to these features. The goal of language acquisition is to acquire this idealized standardized form, regardless of whether the language is acquired as a first or subsequent language or is acquired simultaneously with others. This view of language articulates with a medical model of disability and intervention. Within this model, disability is seen as inherent to the person, and the aim of intervention is to overcome the disability by helping the person to approximate as closely as possible to an idealized norm of functioning.

Various sociolinguists attribute the conceptualization of language as a system to the rise of nationalism and the establishment of nation states in Europe in the later part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century (Jørgensen, 2008; Petrovic, 2015; Wolff, 2017; Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994; Wright, 2015). A national language was seen as central to the project nation – the uniting of a people in a specified territory under a common language. National languages were standardized in grammar, vocabulary, and written form. They were declared official and designated for use in public spheres, including public education. A language came to be viewed as an idealized system removed from actual language practices.

Monolingualism

Nationalist ideals resulted in language policies that favored monolingualism with limited support and sometimes downright suppression of not only minority languages (e.g., Welsh in Britain and Occitan in France) but also non-standard varieties, such as regional dialects. In the field of psycholinguistics, the view was espoused that learning more than one language in childhood caused mental confusion (Saer, 1923). When the learning of a new language became necessary (e.g., immigrants learning the majority language of their new country), it was accepted that it needed to occur at the expense of the first language. The loss of the home language was seen as a necessary step toward social advancement and integration.

AAC practitioners may recognize underlying monolingual ideals in many of the service models and intervention approaches in the field. The view that exposure to more than one language can disadvantage children with communication disorders, including those who require AAC, is prevalent in many contexts (De Valenzuela et al., 2016; Drysdale et al., 2015; Levey & Sola, 2013; Tönsing et al., 2018; Yu, 2013). At present, we are not aware of evidence that supports the superiority of either the use of mono- or multilingual approaches in AAC intervention. The absence of such evidence makes it difficult for practitioners to choose a defensible course of action; however, they would do well in interrogating the possible language ideologies underlying service models that only support the majority language and show limited attempts to provide or develop AAC systems in other languages.

Separate Multilingualism

In the second half of the 20th century, a number of psycholinguistic studies countered the hypothesis of cognitive disadvantage in bilingual versus monolingual speakers (e.g., Diebold, 1966; Jones, 1959; Peal & Lambert, 1962). In addition, voices were raised questioning the

monolingual ideal and the suppression of cultural and linguistic minority groups in the education system (Cummins, 1981; Diebold, 1966). At the same time, liberalist and human rights approaches highlighted minority rights, including language rights (Lewis et al., 2012b; Petrovic, 2015; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008). Language-rights activists called for and pointed out additive multilingual practices, whereby additional languages are learnt and used without the home language falling into disuse. Examples are bilingual education models that successfully build on and support the competence of the home language and additional languages (Rolstad et al., 2007).

What has now been termed *separate multilingualism* (Zhang & Chan, 2017, p. 35) emerged as a counter dialogue to hegemonic nationalist language policies (García & Sylvan, 2011); however, within this conceptualization, language is still defined as a system rather than as a practice (Petrovic, 2015; Wright, 2015). This view has also been termed *parallel monolingualism* (Petrovic, 2015, p. 99) and *double monolingualism* (Jørgensen, 2008, p. 163). Proponents of this view believe that additive multilingualism is possible, but that languages should be kept strictly separate, and that languages also exist as separate entities within the multilingual speaker. Becoming multilingual is believed to be best achieved when languages are kept separate in the home (e.g., one parent—one language) and in educational contexts (e.g., separated by subject, teacher, or time) (Lewis et al., 2012b). The multilingual speaker is expected to only use one language at a time. Use of multiple languages within one utterance or one conversation is seen as problematic and an indicator of lower proficiency (Grosjean, 1985; Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994). Proficiency in each language tends to be judged according to monolingual norms. The multilingual person is therefore viewed through a monolingual lens (Cook, 2016).

AAC practitioners whose practices align with this conceptualization of multilingualism would advocate for the support of all of a child's languages. Such multilingual support would already present a major shift in practice from the prevailing monolingual approach that has dominated practice in the field of communication disorders for many years (Soto & Yu, 2014). Separate multilingualism, however, would mean a strict separation between languages supported via AAC, for example, by context. A child might be supported via an English AAC system at school and via a home-language based AAC system in the home, likely by different interventionists. There would be no need to integrate the AAC systems supporting the different languages in any way. Picture-based aided systems in the different languages could arguably contain a different vocabulary and have a different layout. There would be no need for the system to accommodate code-switching.

Language as Practice: From Integration to Transformative Practice

Instead of viewing language as a system, language can be conceptualized as practice. In this view, language is inseparable from its users, who are not just compliant followers of an idealized system but rather actors with agency to comply or subvert, to create and reinvent language as they use it (Jørgensen, 2008). Language is a resource and a utility that is employed to achieve a variety of goals. The term *linguaging* as a verb embodies this shift from language as a noun to language as an action (Lewis et al., 2012a, p. 656). Viewing language as practice rather than as a system complies with (a) observations and reports of the flexible language behaviors of multilingual speakers, who often draw on and use all the languages they know within an interaction with other multilinguals (Jørgensen, 2008); (b) neurolinguistics studies showing the neural interrelatedness of different languages in the brain (e.g., Hoshino & Thierry, 2011); and

(c) sociolinguists' inability to successfully draw clear boundaries around languages, language varieties, and dialects (Jørgensen, 2008).

Because language is seen as a tool and a capacity that is used in a way that is inseparable from the context and from its speakers, viewing language as a system aligns with the biopsychosocial model of disability, as articulated in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF; World Health Organization, 2001). The ICF describes human functioning as an interplay between the person (body structures and functions as well as personal factors) and the environment, ideally resulting in participation in valued activities. Language as a human capacity is used to achieve valued life goals. It is also socially constructed, with each language user having agency but also responding to the context around them.

Integrated Bilingualism

Various authors have suggested that a multilingual speaker's language resource is an integrated whole that differs from the language resources of two or more monolingual speakers combined. The notion of such an integrated language resource is found in *integrated bilingualism* (Jørgensen, 2008, p. 163) and *linguistic multicompetence* (Cook, 2016, p. 1). It is also found in the *wholistic view* of bilingualism (Grosjean, 1985, p. 467). The groundwork of Cummins (1981) laid by the Common Underlying Proficiency model should also not be ignored. All of these conceptualizations emphasize that multilingual speakers selectively use aspects of any of the languages they know – even within one utterance. The linguistic term *code switching* (Grosjean, 2013, p. 18) describes the use of words from different languages within one conversation, either within or between sentences. Rather than being viewed as undesirable or even pathological, code switching is viewed as serving a variety of specific purposes and as evidence of a high level of bilingual skill (Arnfast & Jørgensen, 2003; Lewis et al., 2012b). From

the perspective of integrated bilingualism the language resources of the multilingual speaker are viewed as a whole; however, there is still a notion that features used by the speaker belong to separate languages (Jørgensen, 2008). Therefore, these approaches do not entirely depart from the view of language as a system.

Such conceptualizations of multilingualism would challenge AAC practitioners to support persons from multilingual backgrounds in a manner that acknowledges their language resources in an integrated way. Rather than rigidly separating languages, individuals who use AAC should be provided with systems that mirror their languages and also allow them to use these languages interchangeably, for example, by code switching easily between the languages on the system.

Translanguaging

The term *translanguaging* was originally coined to describe child-centred educational practices that aimed to use two or more languages to reinforce each other and to reinforce learning (Lewis et al., 2012b, p. 641). The term was then extended to everyday language practices observed in multilingual communities. In these communities, speakers are observed to purposefully and fluidly (often within one exchange) draw on a variety of linguistic resources in their repertoire to negotiate an interaction (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; García & Sylvan, 2011; Jørgensen, 2008; Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010; Simpson, 2015; Wei, 2011). Such language practice has been proposed as evidence that boundaries between the languages of a multilingual person are artificial and socially constructed. Terms such as *flexible multilingualism* (Zhang & Chan, 2017, p. 35), *dynamic bilingualism* (García & Sylvan, 2011, p. 388), *polylinguaging* (Jørgensen, 2008, p. 163), and *metrolingualism* (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010, p. 243) have all been used to describe

aspects of this phenomenon and overlap conceptually with the term translanguaging. For the purpose of this paper, translanguaging is defined in the words of Wei (2011):

...translanguaging is both going between different linguistic structures and systems, including different modalities (speaking, writing, signing, listening, reading, remembering) and going beyond them. It includes the full range of linguistic performances of multilingual language users for purposes that transcend the combination of structures, the alternation between systems, the transmission of information and the representation of values, identities and relationships. The act of translanguaging then is transformative in nature; it creates a social space for the multilingual language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and making it into a lived experience. (p. 1223).

As a pedagogical strategy, translanguaging implies the recognition and acceptance of all language resources that students possess (Lewis et al., 2012b). Teachers should furthermore actively encourage students to draw on all their language resources, for example, by using home and school languages in student discussion groups. Although translanguaging practices may entail translation and code switching, they also go beyond such techniques (García & Sylvan, 2011; Lewis et al., 2012a). Translanguaging implies a socially critical and metalinguistic engagement with language and languages. For example, students may be encouraged to reflect on the use of different languages, language varieties, and registers as well as the social and cultural connotations these languages and language practices may have. The use of different media (e.g., written texts, audio recordings, film, and video) are also central to this approach, and

students are encouraged to reflect on how and why they use the different media in communication and learning. While the evidence of the impact of translanguaging on educational outcomes in elementary to high school education is as yet limited, benefits have been shown in empirical studies of higher education contexts (Madiba, 2014; Makalela, 2015).

As a strategy used by multilingual language users, translanguaging entails acts of identity negotiation and expression, especially in contexts where language and culture may in some respect be quite fluid (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010). It may furthermore entail implicitly or explicitly taking up a position in relation to the interaction partners (aligning or distancing) and also in relation to the macrocontext with its prevailing language ideology (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Jørgensen, 2008).

As a practice, translanguaging resonates with the general approaches and practices of AAC service providers. The acceptance and use of alternative forms of communication and a focus on multimodality is fundamental to the field (Zangari et al., 1994). Translanguaging may therefore be inherent in AAC, just like it may be inherent in Deaf education. Students who are deaf often learn the written form of oral language while using sign language for face-to-face conversations and therefore toggle between different language forms and modes (Lewis et al., 2012a). Ideologically, translanguaging highlights the need for the environment (e.g., schools) to adapt to the abilities and needs of the person, rather than vice versa. Agency-enhancing and identify-affirming practices are integral. Such practices have also repeatedly been emphasized in the field of AAC (Blackstone et al., 2007; McNaughton et al., 2019). When supporting persons from multilingual backgrounds, AAC service providers should accept and support not only a variety of communication modalities but also all of the language resources and features the person knows and is exposed to in their environment. AAC system designers and interventionists

would be challenged to think about how language resources are used in the community of the individual using AAC to engage in meaning making. They would also be challenged to find creative solutions in bridging communicating gaps in ways that not only align to the multilingual practices and resources in communities but also transcend them.

Interrogating Our Language Ideology

As AAC practitioners, our aim is to facilitate and maximize communication potential, skill, and processes for individuals in need of AAC and their network of communication partners. When supporting multilingual individuals and families, our professional practices are an enactment – consciously or subconsciously - of specific language ideologies that we may hold and may have adopted in response to the ideologies embraced by the training institutions that prepared us for practice and by the societal systems around us. Critical interrogation of these ideologies can lead to more reflective, deliberate, and thoughtful practices as well as questioning of those practices that do not align with research evidence and with the language realities of our clients. Taking the lead from Petrovic (2015), we may ask questions in relation to the goals of language planners, language communities, the families and individuals we support, and also of ourselves. Some of the questions that may guide this process of reflexivity are: (a) Do we envision the person using AAC functioning within a monolingual society? (b) Do we envision receptive multilingualism but expressive monolingualism for the person using AAC? (c) Do we consider some languages to be more important than others for the person using AAC? (d) To what extent do we value, embrace, and actively foster linguistic diversity and the use of multiple modalities, ranging from less linguistic to more linguistic ones? (e) How do we understand the language practices and choices made by language planners, language communities, institutions, families, and individuals using AAC?

Indirect Influences of Language Ideology on AAC Practice

AAC practices do not take place in a vacuum. Language ideologies can indirectly influence our practices through factors such as the legal and policy context relevant to the country, the service models we operate within, and the language choices and practices of the families with whom we work. To illustrate how these factors may play out, examples from the United States' and South African contexts are discussed in the sections following.

Legal and Policy Context

In some countries, one or more language(s) are designated as official. These languages have legal status, and governments are typically constitutionally obliged to promote them. The designation of multiple languages as official could be a facilitator for multilingual practices, while the designation of only one language as official could be a barrier. In South Africa, 11 languages are constitutionally designated as official languages of the country (The Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996), thereby (on paper) affirming the equal status of these languages. This approach has been criticized as promoting parallel monolingualism rather than reflecting the sociolinguistic realities on the ground (Plüddemann, 2015). However, this constitutional provision can nevertheless be productively engaged in advocacy efforts by AAC interventionists to motivate for resources that enable the provision of AAC services in multiple and diverse languages.

In the United States there is no designated national official language. No specific language or language variety is therefore officially elevated in status above any other language or language variety. At a constitutional level there are therefore no explicit barriers to linguistic diversity. The lack of an official language can furthermore be seen as an opportunity to support

and include not only various standard language varieties in intervention but also a variety of communication modes and forms.

Laws and policies that govern the language used in the public education system of a country may have important implications for multilingual children in need of AAC. The post-apartheid national Language in Education Policy (LiEP; Department of Education, 1997) in South Africa is founded on principles of additive multilingualism, encouraging the maintenance and development of the home language and encouraging acquisition of additional languages. The policy allows for any of the 11 official South African languages to be used as language(s) of learning and teaching (LoLT) in the public schooling system. Each school's decisions must be made in response to the needs of the community the school serves. South Africa's Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAPS; Department of Basic Education, 2018), however, makes little provision for the use of languages other than English for subject instruction beyond the third grade. This lack illustrates the monolingual assimilationist language ideologies of curriculum developers, undermining the additive multilingual aspirations of the LiEP (Plüddemann, 2015). Some teachers have been reported to intuitively use code switching or even translanguaging strategies in the classroom (Probyn, 2015) to assist learners' comprehension, thereby using language resources in a dynamic way that transcends even the additive multilingual notions of the LiEP. However, teachers often viewed such strategies as illegitimate practices, not in line with policy that suggests that languages should not be mixed (Probyn, 2009; Setati et al., 2002). Other teachers were reported to only or mainly use English, expressing the belief that this practice best fostered learning and language acquisition (Msila, 2014; Probyn, 2015).

The educational provision for children with disabilities in South Africa should be guided by Education White Paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department

of Education, 2001) as well as the Policy for Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (Department of Education, 2014). While both documents acknowledge that the LoLT could be a barrier if different to the child's home language, no recommendations are made as to how this barrier is to be addressed. Similarly, the progress report on the implementation of White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) makes no mention of the LoLT, and it seems that any potential barriers in this regard are virtually ignored. Interestingly, the LiEP exonerates children with intellectual disabilities from learning additional languages, reinforcing the view that it is difficult or impossible for some children to do so (Department of Education, 1997).

According to Gándara and Escamilla (2017), language in education policies in the United States have vacillated between tolerance and repression of bilingualism. The replacement of the Bilingual Education Act (1968) by the Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students provision of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) limited bilingual education options in favor of earlier integration into full English immersion. Ideologically, therefore, this act also stems from monolingual assimilationist views. The Common Core State Standards adopted in 2009 were originally only available in English, and, like the South African CAPS document, they seemed to propose that the ultimate goal of education is English proficiency, rather than multilingualism. Many bilingual education programs exist in the United States, including transitional bilingual education programs, where the home language is used as a language of instruction for a limited period of time before transitioning to English; as well as dual language programs, where two languages are used for instruction for sustained periods of time, and bilingualism and biliteracy is explicitly the aim (Gándara & Escamilla, 2017). However, since separate legislation (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1990) governs educational provisions for students with disabilities in the United States, access to

bilingual education opportunities for these students is also typically limited (Cioè-Peña, 2017). Whereas the ability to speak more than one language is often regarded as an asset in today's global society, the rhetoric surrounding bilingualism/multilingualism for children with disabilities continues to be strongly subtractive (Yu, 2016).

Hegemonic Service Models

AAC service providers need to become aware of the inequities of current service models that systematically exclude certain sections of the population, based on certain characteristics, including language. A medical model of rehabilitation coupled with a view of language as structure and a view of multilingualism as a risk may in many ways have contributed to the exclusion of persons from minority language backgrounds from intervention. In this regard, the intersectionality of language, race, geographical location (urban versus rural), and socioeconomic status also needs to be acknowledged.

Options for multilingual or minority language-focused communication intervention and education for children with disabilities are often severely limited (Cioè-Peña, 2017). De Valenzuela and colleagues (2016) interviewed professionals from Canada, the United States, the Netherlands, and England, and found that children with developmental disabilities from minority language backgrounds were often excluded from bilingual education opportunities that would provide instruction in their home language. In South Africa, systemic exclusion of the non-White majority of the population (the majority of whom were African language³ speakers) not only from quality education but also from healthcare under the Apartheid regime has continued into the present day. Pillay et al. (2020) found that 78% of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and audiologists work in the private healthcare sector, serving 16% of the population – mainly the affluent historically advantaged white population. The majority of SLPs have English or

Afrikaans as their home language, and SLP services (including AAC intervention) are primarily provided in English (Dada et al., 2017; Kathard et al., 2011).

In South African schools for learners with special educational needs, language diversity is often high because learners do not only come from the geographical area immediately surrounding the school. English as the language of instruction is often a pragmatic solution to learner language diversity. Furthermore, estimates indicate that more than half of the school-aged population with disabilities (over 500 000 children) is not in school, in spite of the fact that basic education is mandated by law (Department of Education, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2015). Although this figure is not aggregated by home language, it is likely that children living in poverty and in rural areas would be most affected. It is therefore clear that access to education and intervention - especially home language education and intervention – is still very limited for persons from African language backgrounds.

Besides limited bilingual intervention and education options, commercially available aided AAC systems in languages other than English may also be limited. For example, the availability of high-technology speech generating devices with synthetic speech, an extensive pre-programmed vocabulary, as well as grammar support and text prediction in minority languages are still severely limited. In South Africa, synthetic adult voices for Android and Windows operating systems in all 11 official languages have only recently become available (Schlünz et al., 2017; Titmus et al., 2016) and are able to be used in conjunction with Windows-based AAC software. However, pre-programmed vocabulary sets and grammar support are, for the most part, not available.

Family Language Choices and Practices

As one tenet of evidence-based practice, client and family perspectives should always be considered in AAC intervention (Schlosser & Raghavendra, 2004). Multilingual families and families from minority language backgrounds explicitly or implicitly make choices and engage in language practices that encourage the use of certain languages and possibly discourage the use of others (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013; Macalister & Mirvahedi, 2017). The family's language ideology typically influences these decisions.

Monolingual language ideologies at the national level have necessarily placed pressure on the language decisions and practices of families who are from multilingual and/or minority language backgrounds. Families who ascribe to this ideology would generally see themselves forced to choose the majority language at the cost of any other languages they know or have used before. South African parents have reported the belief that a shift towards English at the cost of their home language would maximize the economic, social, and educational participation opportunities of their children (De Klerk, 2002; Kamwangamalu, 2003; Msila, 2014). This subtractive approach of multilingualism is often tension-filled and accompanied by feelings of loss of language identity and culture, as well as experiences of alienation from the home language community (De Klerk, 2002; Kamwangamalu, 2003).

Interestingly, while South African parents often report the perceived need to abandon their home language and to use English exclusively in the home (De Klerk, 2002), there is as yet little evidence that the use of languages other than English is decreasing. South African statistics in this regard suggest that home languages are maintained, although relegated to the domain of family and community interaction, while English is added through educational exposure and the media (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2012; Posel & Zeller, 2016). South African family language

practices, therefore, seem to belie the monolingual ideology. In line with a more inclusive approach, some parents express the belief that learning English does not mean giving up on the home language (De Klerk, 2002; Msila, 2014). Similar perspectives were reported by parents in the United States who chose to raise their children bilingually in Spanish and English (King & Fogle, 2006). They also reported, however, that extended family members tended to hold a monolingual language ideology, sometimes associated with perceptions of stigma associated with the minority language.

Educational opportunities play an important role in parents' language decisions. In South Africa, schools in historically white areas where English and Afrikaans are used as the LoLT are still mostly better resourced and are therefore the schools of choice for many parents (De Klerk, 2002; Kathard et al., 2011). English as the vehicle of opportunity has also been emphasized by various advocacy groups in the United States, such as US English, ProEnglish, and English for the Children (Petrovic, 2015). One line of argumentation of these groups, whose aim is to abolish bilingual education programs, is that different provisions for non-English or bilingual children leads to further exclusion and disadvantage. As in the case of South African parents, some parents from non-English language backgrounds in the United States highlighted the tension between their positive views of home language maintenance and multilingualism and their negative perceptions of the quality of bilingual education programs (Farruggio, 2010; Lee, 1999).

The limited options for multilingual education and communication interventions mentioned in the previous section often direct the language decision of parents whose children have communication disorders (Drysdale et al., 2015; van Dalen, 2019; Yu, 2013). In addition, parents often have concerns about the capacity of their children with communication disorders to

become multilingual (De Valenzuela et al., 2016; Drysdale et al., 2015; Tönsing et al., 2018; Yu, 2013, 2016). These concerns may stem from observations that their children struggle to acquire expressive and receptive language skills, and these observations may be combined with a monolingual language ideology that problematizes multilingualism. It is here that parents often look to SLPs for guidance and advice, and it is here that respectful and family-centered conversations should be held, with SLPs listening to and understanding parents' concerns while giving information about the current level of evidence in the field, neither diminishing nor overgeneralizing or exaggerating the findings. In the case of AAC interventions, there is as yet no research evidence that clearly establishes the superiority of a mono- versus a multilingual approach. Extrapolating findings from research focused on children with specific language impairment, autism spectrum disorders, and Down Syndrome (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016) remains difficult, as these populations may differ in important ways from children in need of AAC. However, we would argue that recommendations regarding language practices and choices need to take the sociolinguistic realities of many family and community contexts into consideration and that maximum participation remains the goal. In an ethnographic study of a bilingual family of a child with autism spectrum disorder who was committed to speaking only in English to their child, Yu (2016) described how advising parents to limit or separate their use of languages when speaking with their child can cause parents significant stress and result in language practices that further exclude and marginalize their child with disabilities from family interactions in the home language.

Developing Inclusive Translingual Practices in AAC

A variety of factors could be considered in developing more inclusive, translingual AAC practices. Macro- and microsystemic factors related to intervention, research, and continuing

professional education should be taken into account.

Macrosystemic Factors

Kathard and Pillay (2013) advocate for political consciousness as a tool for service providers to interrogate how factors at all levels of the system may contribute to or hinder equitable opportunities for education and intervention services. While not neglecting the focus on the individual, service providers need to widen their focus to population-based concerns – do all potential clients have equal access to their services? If not, who is receiving services, and who is excluded? How can services become inclusive and collaborative, and address collective concerns? On a more philosophical note – do our conceptions of language, multilingualism, and what it means to be a competent communicator align with the sociolinguistic and sociocommunicative realities of the communities, families, and individuals we serve?

AAC System Design and Customization

When designing AAC systems, these questions should also be asked. While systems should not limit the potential for generative and autonomous message formulation, an emphasis on language structure should not eclipse an emphasis on communication practice and efficiency in system design. How can code-switching and translanguaging practices be accommodated in system design? How can new urban language varieties that differ from so-called “standard forms” be accommodated? Although an over-emphasis on structure runs the risk of ignoring pragmatics, imposing system design elements that reflect linguistic structure in one language on systems in languages with a different linguistic structure is not helpful (Baker & Chang, 2006; Soto & Yu, 2014; Tönsing et al., 2019; Yong, 2006). The participation of persons in need of AAC and their families from non-English and multilingual backgrounds in the design of appropriate AAC systems would be one method of democratizing the process. Far too many

monolingual AAC systems and devices are currently still abandoned. Possibly the design of systems that give access to non-English languages is an opportunity to follow a more bottom-up, participatory and inclusive design pathway – a pathway that could lead to systems and devices that meet the needs of individuals and families more effectively. Listening to families and exploring their beliefs about language use is a powerful entry into understanding and addressing family priorities: “Instead of being given advice, families need to be understood, informed and encouraged to arrive at dynamic ways of speaking among family members that are self-enhancing and that can adapt flexibly to their changing needs over time and across contexts” (Yu, 2016, p. 433). In bilingual contexts, choices of language are critical pragmatic resources and primary means of affiliation. Advising families to not use their home language with their child with disabilities may have long lasting effects on the ability of the child to develop competencies to participate in different contexts.

Vocabulary selection aligned to translingual clinical practice would also benefit from a participatory approach. The vocabulary selection framework by Bean and colleagues (2019), for example, includes the involvement of a team, including family members. This team should jointly consider and integrate contextual and linguistic (pragmatic and grammatical) information in the selection process. The language practices within various relevant contexts (e.g., in the classroom, between peers, with siblings, and in interaction with parents) would be important to understand, as would the semantic items and grammatical structures that are necessary to participate in these contexts. Careful consideration should be given to the situations in which translanguaging practices may be preferred, encouraged, and modelled. The selected lexicon should be able to be used as an integrated whole, even when vocabulary items come from two or more different languages. The graphic representation of a lexicon that encodes words from more

than one language would also need careful consideration. Existing graphic symbol libraries (most of which are developed with reference to the English language) may need to be supplemented or new libraries developed to represent words from other languages. Grammatical aspects of those languages as well as cultural relevance and connotations with specific representations would need to be considered (Andres, 2006; Baker & Chang, 2006; Karal et al., 2016). In addition, other representations such as personal videos may be considered as communication modes that may transcend language boundaries to an extent (Legel et al., 2018; Norrie et al., 2016).

Training and Research

Training institutions have a responsibility in both directing research priorities and designing the curricula of training programs of future professionals. Training curricula should prepare service providers to become reflective and responsive practitioners, with an ability to enter into collaborative and meaningful partnerships with families, other team members, and communities, regardless of the degree of match to their own language and culture (see Solomon-Rice et al., 2018). Attracting students from diverse language and cultural backgrounds to AAC training programs is also highly desirable. In South Africa, questions have been raised as to the inclusivity and cultural and linguistic responsiveness of training programs. Programs need to be acceptable to and welcoming of students from diverse backgrounds (Khoza-Shangase & Mophosho, 2018). Curricula need to be context-relevant across the whole breadth of the population, and not only focus on methods and research relevant to a specific sector (e.g., English monolingual clients with private medical insurance). Students need to be able to relate what they learn to themselves and their context.

Research and developments that could further translinguistic AAC practices may include the use of discourse analytic methods to describe the use of linguistic resources by multimodal and multilingual children who use AAC and their partners. Discourse analysis may widen the focus of research to include not only the individual and their communication challenges but also the dyad (or group of speakers) and their communication accomplishments (Sterponi & de Kirby, 2016). In this way, interventions can build on strengths as well as attempt to compensate for challenges. Studying the interactions between multilingual speakers without disabilities may also be of benefit. While the aim would not be to establish a normative framework, such studies could help us to learn more about the discourse strategies, as well as the semantic, pragmatic, and grammatical aspects of such interactions. For example, core vocabularies of multilingual speakers may be helpful to establish as a resource for vocabulary selection. The development of graphic symbols that can encode different languages with different linguistic structures is also needed, while the organization of vocabulary items in a manner that allows for movement along the continuum of language practice described in Figure 1 should also be considered. Studies that investigate the effect of tranlanguaging approaches in AAC on a variety of communication and participation outcomes would also be of prime importance.

Continuing education programs may introduce the concept of translingual AAC practice to service providers and encourage them to reflect on its utility and possible application. In the absence of research evidence to guide practice, practice-to-research partnerships may be encouraged to explore relevant questions and commence with the generation of clinically relevant and applicable evidence (Goldstein et al., 2019).

The acquisition of minority languages by AAC service providers such as SLPs and educators may likewise be desirable (Paneque & Barbetta, 2010), but it may not always be

realistic. The involvement of translators and interpreters in some contexts can be helpful – often such individuals can also act as cultural brokers. However, such individuals are not always available. Pillay (2013) suggests that SLPs specifically need to become translinguistic therapists, who are able to provide intervention regardless of the degree to which their own language and cultural backgrounds match those of the clients and families they serve. AAC service providers, possibly more than anyone else, should be equipped to bridge communication gaps, and versed in creative strategies such as employing pictures and graphic symbols as well as online translation functions.

Conclusion

This paper represents an effort to discuss language ideology and its impact on current AAC practice and service delivery models. There is a paucity of studies on the development of bilingualism/multilingualism in persons using AAC. Given the sociocultural complexities inherent in being a member of a non-dominant community, a person in need of AAC, and a person with a disability, there is a need to describe the intersectionality of factors resulting in the exclusion of persons in need of AAC from opportunities to use and develop skills in multiple languages. Language ideology is offered as a broad-based framework for examining these factors.

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End Notes

¹ This term tends to describe persons from multilingual backgrounds in predominantly monolingual countries, but can also be applied to groups that may be a majority in numbers but speak a language different from the accepted lingua franca of multilingual countries like South Africa.

² Language practice describes “the patterned use of ... (a) linguistic repertoire” (Spolsky & Shohamy, 2000, p. 1). It refers to the actual use of language in real situations by individuals, families, or communities.

³ The term African language is used to refer to a language that has its linguistic origin in Africa. In South Africa, this term excludes English and Afrikaans, classified as West-Germanic languages.