

PREFACE TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

General Editors' Introduction

We are exceptionally pleased to introduce the first special issue of 2026, *Multidialectism in the Multilingual Turn*, guest edited by Dan Walter, Associate Professor of German and Linguistics at Oxford College of Emory University, and Julia Ruck, Assistant Teaching Professor at Emory University. Dan and Julia bring a robust mix of experience and expertise to the table, making them ideal editors for this particular special issue: their training in applied linguistics, second language acquisition, and world language education is coupled with extensive experience in the world language classroom. This combination has yielded important research and practitioner guidance on numerous important contemporary issues in world language teaching, including multidialectism in the classroom. Our sincere thanks go out to the guest editors, who have shaped and shepherded the volume with care.

At its core, this special issue centers variety *within* named languages in world language teaching and learning scholarship. In doing so, it productively challenges foundational yet problematic assumptions in world language teaching/learning research, theory and practice, such as problematic conceptualizations of language (e.g., standard language ideology, monolingual language ideology) (Pillar, 2015).

Indeed, world language education has long focused curricular and scholarly attention on learning a very particular variety of language: it is the dominant, standardized, legitimized variety of a named language that fills the pages of world language textbooks and that is presented to language learners as the gold standard. This approach eclipses varieties deemed less prestigious or valuable, flattening the linguistic richness and complexity of many real-world contexts and interactions.

This flattening, while often done in the name of reducing complexity for students already overwhelmed by the challenges of learning new languages, has consequences. As the guest editors note, ignoring linguistic diversity within named languages works to reproduce and reinforce problematic ideologies:

After all, without a critical lens applied to who/what defines the standard(s) of a language, and a simultaneous complacency or even aversion to teaching non-standard varieties, we are complicit in the replication of linguistic and social hierarchies, the marginalization of non-standard variety speakers, and the ideological imagination of homogeneous monolingual nation states that ignores the central discursive, social, and identity functions of non-standard varieties. (Walter & Ruck, p. 2)

Removing linguistic diversity from world language education is also a disservice to learners. Without an awareness of the full range of linguistic resources at play, learners are ill-equipped to navigate the situations and contexts they will find themselves in outside our classrooms. Moreover, in insisting on the rigidity of language boundaries and borders, world language education also fails to adequately teach students about language itself, misrepresenting it as simple and standardized rather

than complex, context-dependent, embodied, and power-imbued (Kramersch & Whiteside, 2008; May, 2013).

Indeed, a key contribution of this special issue is that the challenges to problematic language ideologies it raises are brought directly to the classroom, engaging students in the analysis and disruption of these ideologies and supporting the development of a more robust understanding of language. The articles within this special issue contain broad approaches that can be incorporated by many languages, as well as lessons from specific languages for teachers and students.

Taken as a whole, the volume promises to become an important reference point for future work on centering linguistic variety, rather than singularity, within world language education.

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