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Schlagworte: Multilingualism; multilingual writing processes; writing process; written communication tutoring

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Multilingualism in Writing Center Work

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Abstract

Writing centers can play a key role in developing universities as multilingual organizations, enhancing access to languages and multilingualism. They support multilingual writing and language skills. This paper explores multilingualism, particularly the impact of language switching on working memory during writing. It also reviews data from writing centers in Germany that adopt a multilingual approach. The findings suggest that enabling individuals to strategically choose from their language repertoire is essential. Additionally, using all languages can boost self-confidence and reduce cognitive strain in the writing process.

Introduction

Multilingual individuals have been shown to develop unique and sophisticated strategies for language acquisition and writing compared to monolingual individuals (Canagarajah 2013). The relationship between writing skills and the different languages of multilinguals are based on the linguistic and metacognitive knowledge of such learners (Schnoor/Usanova 2023). The multilingual writing process, which we define here as an individual's writing processes where multilingualism comes into play, has been shown to have positive relationships between languages in use. This has been interpreted as an indication that languages (knowledge) serve as mutual resources.

Often, the concept of multilingualism is viewed through the lens of second language (L2) acquisition, which may consequently lead to a deficit-based perspective. The ability to speak more than one language, particularly if it is a heritage language of a minority group, is not always regarded as a valuable asset but rather as a disadvantage, particularly in monolingually-oriented environments such as educational institutions. However, pedagogical principles should aim for the general recognition of the language(s) of learners who have grown up multilingually. Furthermore, such principles should facilitate the development of multifaceted and dynamic identities and competencies within multilinguals (Gantefort 2020: 202). Writing centers are thus in an ideal position to help develop a multilingual-oriented organization and positively influence people's access to languages and multilingualism while at university.

The benefits of multilingualism, and related aspects, are addressed in the first part of the following paper. To address the topic of multilingualism itself, the second part of the paper presents practical reports and empirical results from the tutorial practices of writing centers across Germany. The second part of the paper presents practical reports and empiri-

cal results from written communication tutoring in Germany that addresses the topic of multilingualism. From these findings, the paper concludes with how multilingual practices can become more relevant and implemented in writing center work.

Multilingualism in the brain

The writing process is a dynamic system comprising a series of writing situations in which strategies and routines are deployed and in which numerous factors exert influence (Flower and Hayes 1981; Bereiter and Scardamalia 1981; Kellogg 1996; Göpferich 2015). The role of the working memory in the multilingual writing process is significant one, given its involvement in the process of generating suitable formulations in L2 (Kellog et al. 2013). The cognitive burden imposed by the demands of writing can impede concentration on the structural level and the actual arguments themselves. It is important to understand how the use of multiple languages during the already complex writing process impacts working memory, whether it be in a stressful or enriching manner. When writing in a less dominant language, it is possible that the demands associated with language (such as vocabulary organization and grammar) may take precedence over the demands inherent to the act of writing itself (such as text development and reader guidance). This can result in a text that is less aligned with the desired register and text type (Göpferich/Nelezen 2014).

The executive function of multilinguals is enhanced due to the trained ability to inhibit different stimuli, the broad development of working memory, and cognitive flexibility (Matías-Guiu et al. 2019). Indeed, multilinguals have a greater capacity for cognitive maintenance (Sambanis 2020), which could be an argument for training reading and writing abilities in all languages of the multilingual or at least for not cutting them out. The act of reading and writing allows for the exploration of a wide range of linguistic registers and contributes to the development of a more nuanced and diverse language competence.

Contrary to what a monolingual might imagine, multilinguals perceive their languages as a continuum, with no clear boundaries between languages (Herdina /Jessner 2002). Multilingual individuals possess an overall linguistic repertoire, which they deploy strategically, flexibly, and in an integrated manner, contingent on the social context (Gantefort 2020). Translanguaging describes the flexible use of the multilingual repertoire. The term refers to a conceptual framework for describing multilingualism and multilingual communicative action (e.g. García 2009). The term multilingual is sometimes described as an additive view of the language relationship, namely a combination of different languages, in contrast to the term translanguaging, which is focused on synergy. In this instance, the languages are in contact and exert an influence upon one another. Accordingly, communicative actions involve lexical, grammatical, and textual elements of different languages, which multilingual people use flexibly in communication according to their needs and purposes (García/Wei 2014). Translanguaging, therefore, is defined as a “functional, interactional, and dynamic understanding of multilingualism” (Gürsoy/Roll 2018). The research suggests that languages are not discrete modular systems, but are interconnected, and simultaneously activated during the writing process. Even if they are suppressed by certain mechanisms in monolingual situa-

tions, the full potential of multilingualism for the learning process can only be exploited if learners deepen and expand their metalinguistic and metacognitive knowledge in the existing languages. Even first language (L1) speakers engage in cross-linguistic relationships when they read and write in their first language since they use different registers and so on. In this sense, translangual communication affects all individuals, monolingual and multilinguals speakers alike, and manifests itself in textual products with different types and degrees of language mixing. This is a particularly productive approach for writing centers because it extends multilingualism to learners who initially see themselves as monolingual. The central approach must be to see multilingualism as a norm and resource that is open to everyone, especially at universities, which usually bring together speakers of many languages.

Multilingualism in the writing process

The impact of language switching on working memory is not yet fully understood, as it is highly dependent on numerous factors (Machura 2022: 133). The complexity of these factors underscores the need for individualized advice based on a thorough understanding of the individual case rather than generalized instruction. In order for writers to be able to use their entire linguistic repertoire for learning, the framework conditions for learning must be geared towards linguistic diversity (Gantefort 2020). Writing should be used as a learning medium for cognitive and metacognitive development in relation to multilingualism (Gürsoy/Roll 2018: 353).

When writing, multilinguals can access their entire linguistic repertoire and use linguistic resources in a strategic and routinized manner. Dengerscherz (2019) presents writing as a complex process in which the heuristic and rhetorical dimensions exert an influence at each stage. The use of languages is highly individual but related to (a) situational conditions and (b) attitudes towards languages (Dengerscherz 2020):

a) Situational conditions

Depending on the stage of the writing process, writers may use their languages to enhance creativity, to overcome difficulties in formulating ideas, or to indicate a shift to a meta-level. Dengerscherz (2019) shows that writers use their multilingual repertoire as a resource in the heuristic dimension when planning, developing, and processing content. This suggests that multilinguals use a variety of resources in a highly individualized way, regardless of the task at hand, and develop ideas in different languages. For example, processing speed is enhanced when the more readily available first language is used in a functional way to comprehend content, among other things. The rhetorical dimension involves compensatory work. This involves writers making use of research in their L2. This can be done by using parallel texts and monolingual dictionaries to gather linguistic material to form better words and sentences.

In multilingual writing, writers consciously use all available linguistics and other resources (Friedl/Scharf 2020). For example, multilingual writers use L2, L1 and another (foreign) language (L3) at all stages up to the final version of the text, even if the L3 is not part of

the assignment. The proportion of L1 and L3 gradually decreases during the writing process. According to Friedl and Scharf's data, during the brainstorming phase, about 84 % of the text is written in L1, while about 21 % is written in L3. In contrast, during the writing of the final version, about 13 % of the text is written in L1 and about 9 % in L3. Furthermore, feedback and corrections are used more frequently in L1 and L3 than during the revision of the raw text.

Finally, the complexity of the task and the sub-processes of writing influence language choice. The more demanding the task is perceived to be, the more writers draw on their L1 and on sub-processes related to text organization (higher order concerns). It has been observed that steps such as planning, organizing, and developing, as well as problem solving, are more likely to be carried out in the L1 (Machura 2022). The extent to which the first language is used depends on the level of proficiency in the L2, the process step being worked on, and factors related to the acquisition context and the languages themselves. Advanced L2 learners use their first language less and formulate directly in the L2, especially if they are proficient professional writers (Machura 2022: 121 f.). Regarding the context of acquisition, it is noteworthy that in the context of migration, however, the first language plays a more prominent role. Learners with Spanish as their L1 who moved to the USA before the age of seven and were taught in English tend to rely on Spanish for problem-solving (Jiménez Jiménez 2015, cited in Machura 2022: 124). This can be attributed to the fact that language is also an important factor in the formation of identity and group membership within migrant communities (Ladilova 2015).

Finally, the distance between language families plays an important role in determining the feasibility and timing of their deployment: If the skills associated with conceptual writing are acquired in the first language (L1), these can be transferred to the L2, particularly if the two languages are highly related. The degree of success and smoothness differs depending on whether the switch is made between languages that are closely or distantly related. The frequency with which learners use their L1 during L2 writing is more related to L2 proficiency, while the duration with which they use their L1 during L2 writing is more related to the difficulty of the task. Furthermore, it appears that these general trends are attenuated for the closely-related languages. In non-related languages, writers switched more frequently and for longer than their advanced peers. This was not the case when measuring duration in related languages, as advanced writers spent more time in their L1 than less-expert learners. Writers who spend a long time in a distant L1 during the process produce poorer¹ texts in the L2 than writers who use the same strategy but whose languages are closely related (Woodall 2002).

¹ To measure the effect of language-switching on text quality, the L2 texts were rated independently and blindly by six raters (two per language). The raters, all native speakers and practicing teachers of the L2 at the university, were asked to judge each text as a first draft, using a holistic rating scale based on that of Carroll (1980, cited in Woodall 2002).

b) Attitudes towards multilingualism

The aforementioned is applicable to multilinguals who adopt a positive perspective toward their linguistic repertoire (Dengscherz 2020). Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for writers to view their multilingualism as a barrier rather than an asset (Lira Lorca 2019: 27). Consequently, they may deliberately distance themselves from their first language when writing, or even conceal it (Knorr et al. 2015; Tilmans 2019). The factors influencing an individual's use of their own language repertoire has been categorized by Dengscherz (2020) into three main groups, namely factors that:

- relate to the perception of languages as a burden
- relate to the perception of the languages as an enrichment
- relate to the perception of the languages as normal

For example, the use of the individual's L1 in the L2 can benefit in terms of text quality if the writers are accustomed to codeswitching in their everyday lives or if they have experience translating (Machura 2022). This assumption cannot be made for writers who attempt to inhibit their first language in educational settings. However, if the writers are not trained in this process, switching between languages can place additional strain on their working memory or trigger interference if the structure of the L1 is retained in the L2 when translating (Dengscherz 2020). In particular, less experienced writers, or those who have yet to attain a proficient command of the L2 may be susceptible to cognitive overload in the face of language changes (Machura 2022).

However, if one's own multilingualism is not perceived as a resource but rather as a flaw that needs to be better concealed, this can lead to potential obstacles in the development of academic text competence, as Knorr (2018: 145) states. That finding is corroborated by practical experience from writing workshops (Zernatto 2021: 178). Restrictions in the use of the language repertoire can result in limitations in the ability to cope with writing tasks as a whole (Knorr 2019).

Tutoring situations with students who are still in the process of learning to write in another language should also take into account the impact of grammar-oriented second and/or another language teaching. Those learners often tend to feel insecure about their first language and focus on the grammatical correctness of the target text when writing. This can result in a lack of attention to the structural development and content of the text (Zernatto 2021). When writing in the L2 they focus on the appropriate and correct formulations, to the detriment of the overall structure, namely the argumentation of the text. This can result in a lack of willingness or even resistance to revising the overall structure (Knorr 2011). The act of searching for words can result in delays in the flow of writing and may impede the generation of new ideas with regard to regarding the overall argumentation of the text (Tilmans 2019).

Multilingualism in counseling

It is important to keep in mind that written communication tutoring is always part of the institution in which it takes place. In the event that an institution is monolingual oriented, it falls upon writing centers to undertake further work with the objective of actively and productively integrating multilingualism (Kasprick/Mpoutsis-Voutsis 2019). On the one hand, this concerns the acceptance of counselors and the surrounding institution. On the other hand, it concerns the people seeking advice themselves. The incorporation of multilingualism into the work of writing center, however, fosters a flexible attitude towards languages and the creative implementation of collaboration across languages and professional hierarchies. This, in turn, can help to deconstruct hierarchies in educational institutions to some extent and increase students' agency (Aksakalova 2021). Severino (2002) posits that the writing center serves as a nexus where disparate cultures, languages, literatures, and discourses converge. Writing centers can facilitate the reorientation of language experience away from a deficit-focused approach and towards the enhancement of linguistic identities (Lira Lorca 2019).

In her 2020 study, Wang-Hiles examines the potential of utilizing the L1 in written communication tutoring from the vantage point of both multilingual writers and multilingual tutors. The utilization of the L1 in the counseling of multilingual writers was demonstrated to facilitate the development of their writing and English skills. This approach fosters a conducive learning environment, which markedly enhances their confidence and motivation for writing and language development in the L2.

Nevertheless, those seeking advice often perceive their first language as a hindrance rather than a resource (Lira Lorca 2019: 27). Therefore, the use of the first language is perceived as a diversion and so the text must be delivered in the second or some other language (Knorr et al. 2015). Stierwald (2016: 40) concludes that those seeking advice do not explicitly benefit from their multilingualism for the writing process, despite isolated indications of multilingual writing practice. Stierwald (2016) also assumes that students have considered the advantages of their multilingualism in the writing process for the first time in the context of multilingual counselling and are therefore not yet able to position themselves clearly. In general, the value of the first language of L2 learners at the educational institution is rated as low, and the question of whether the respective first languages should play a greater role is answered rather negatively (Dannerer 2017: 70).

In order to consider the practicality of multilingual writing with those seeking advice, it can be useful to include sample texts more intensively in the reflection, as processes of language development and language dynamics are evident in them.

Practical examples of multilingual writing center work

From the aforementioned discussion, it can be concluded that when incorporating multilingualism into the work of the writing center, it is of the utmost importance to enable people to select from their language repertoire in a targeted manner for individual process steps. In order to achieve this, writers must possess the ability to reflect and draw on all of their linguistic resources throughout the writing process. As previously discussed, this does not always come naturally. The following section presents and discusses data and examples from a writing center's work that actively includes the multilingualism of learners.

In a series of workshops on multilingual academic writing held at a writing centre of a German university, Barczaitis & Grieshammer (2021) presented suggestions for the use of languages and their different registers, as well as for reflection on the use of language. Their evaluation provides some interesting insights into the effects of the workshop on the students' perception of their own multilingualism. They show that the use of other languages in addition to the target language of the text increases during the writing process. Furthermore, the participants stated that they started using different languages in more stages of the writing process than they did before. Barczaitis and Grieshammer (2021) also observed a greater willingness to use academic literature in other languages in addition to the target language of the text. In addition, the participants reported an increase in their perceived confidence in using their language repertoire in the writing process. The use of one's first language in particular (which may be perceived as less academic by those seeking advice) can be associated with anxiety, which can be reduced by actively working with the languages. The greater the student's appreciation for their first language, the more they may use it as a resource for writing. This can result in a broader literature base, greater confidence in expression, and more stable self-confidence in language use in all languages (Barczaitis/Grieshammer 2021: 172 f.).

Learners frequently encounter difficulties in recognizing the structures of academic texts and developing them independently, largely due to the emphasis on linguistic correctness (Zernatto 2021: 184). It is imperative that learners, who have not acquired the L2 as a language of education, rapidly acquire and implement various competences. This can be explained by the fact that the standard of linguistic correctness is a criterion for assessment that is of equal importance to the accuracy of the content. This is further complicated by the fact that assessment criteria are often assumed to be transparent and known by the assessors, and are not explicitly taught (Zernatto 2021: 181).

Another practical example of writing centers and multilingualism is the work being done by Dohmann et al. (2020). They demonstrate that emotions are a central aspect of writing in another language and that these can be specifically addressed in writing tutorials. In individual conversations, emotions such as anxiety, a feeling of inadequacy, or expression problems can be addressed and redirected in a positive direction. Including multilingualism as a resource could further strengthen the positive aspects here. Furthermore, written communication tutoring can enhance the self-confidence of those seeking advice if their multi-

lingual identity is acknowledged and valued within the university context (Kasprick/Mpoutsis-Voutsis 2019: 69).

Tilmans 2019 argues that in order to reduce inhibitions regarding the use of the first language, it can be helpful to demonstrate and reflect on its direct use in counseling. Should counselors possess the requisite skills in the first language of the individual seeking advice, they may incorporate this into the counseling process. Tilmans (2019: 22) presents evidence from counseling sessions conducted in Russian to demonstrate that those seeking advice are willing to accept the open offer to conduct parts of the counseling in their first language. The first language serves a number of functions, including facilitating more fluent communication, clarifying concepts in the first language before they are translated into the L2, and ultimately, fostering relationships. It is to be expected that various advantages and challenges will be encountered (Tilmans 2019: 23 ff.). Those seeking advice can adopt a new perspective on the writing project through counselling in the first language. This may involve a shift from the formulation level (lower order concerns) to the text structure (higher order concerns). Should the discussion of the structure also take place in the student's first language, the focus is on the process and not on the search for the required formulations.

Positive feelings such as intrinsic motivation and self-reflection facilitate the learning process, which is why Knorr (2020: 3) proposes a scale based on the dimension of feeling comfortable with the respective language. The multilingualism of learners can be leveraged to support them in different situations and writing phases. For instance, learners can be encouraged to create the overall structure in a language other than the L2, or to not write the first version of a text exclusively in the L2, but to also use formulations from other languages (Knorr et al. 2015). This approach enables the focus to be placed on the argumentation structure of the text, rather than the language itself (Tilmans 2019: 21). Furthermore, it relieves the working memory when writing.

Learners might need the opportunity and explicit encouragement to write in the language in which they feel most confident (cf. Kasprick/Mpoutsis-Voutsis 2019: 67). In order to reconcile the contradiction between the multilingual writing process and the required monolingual end product, Zernatto (2021: 185 f.) proposes four didactic pillars of counseling, namely:

1. raising awareness of one's own multilingualism and its contextual nature during the process;
2. developing individual strategies for dealing with languages;
3. supporting linguistic relief and shifting focus, especially in the area of higher-order concerns (structuring, topic narrowing, rough draft writing); and
4. building up a scientific language register in the target language at the end of the process.

In addition to (meta-)cognitive skills, external influences such as including peer feedback and feedback from supervisors also play a role in the counseling (Lira Lorca 2019: 27). At an advanced level, the teaching of writing processes should be conducted in small steps, be-

cause texts to be produced become more complex, time-consuming, and require more planning as language skills increase or in certain professional fields (Lira Lorca 2019: 27).

Lira Lorca (2019) also reports on the practice of multilingualism-oriented counseling and concludes that multilingual orientation and structuring, for instance, in the form of code-meshing² freewriting, can prevent writing inhibitions and blockages in a university context (Lira Lorca 2019: 28). It is crucial to identify and subsequently translate significant individual ideas into a L2 in order to transition from a writer-oriented approach to a reader-oriented one. Keywords that lack an exact target language equivalent can enrich the academic discourse if they are integrated into the text in the other language and comprehensively introduced and explained. The specific characteristics and distinctions between languages are analyzed, as are the potential benefits that lexical diversity may offer. This approach facilitates learners' reflections on the reciprocal influence of languages and thinking. It can be argued that only what can be expressed in words can be developed further and subsequently communicated to a readership. The act of reflecting on linguistic idiosyncrasies not only facilitates a more nuanced comprehension of the L2, but also fosters a deeper appreciation for one's first tongue (Lira Lorca 2019: 28–29).

Conclusion

The studies presented there thus indicate that the advantages of multilingual written communication tutoring can be found on three levels: capacity, awareness, and identity. Capacity refers to the reduction of cognitive load through the use of effective strategies. Awareness encompasses the acquisition of new language skills and registers, which serve both: language and self-reflection. Identity is supported through the self-empowerment of learners, who are able to freely use the languages available to them. The language repertoire can assist in reflecting on the communicative purpose of certain phenomena. Nevertheless, multilinguals may require encouragement and training in the utilization of their linguistic resources. There are numerous avenues through which this can be achieved in tutoring, be it in individual sessions or group workshops.

For tutors, this implies that training and further education must provide and/or create targeted opportunities for writers to experiment with their own languages and to include different languages in writing and learning processes. The fear of multilingual 'gibberish' must be overcome, and the strategies of the multilingual brain must be explicitly addressed and tested (code-meshing and code-switching, etc.). It is advisable to guide different process phases (beginning, collection, creativity, conceptualization) by using different languages and to focus on working with parallel texts and formulation aids during the steps leading to the L2 (Machura 2022).

2 Code-meshing is a form of writing in which multilingual individuals integrate their diverse linguistic resources with dominant genre conventions to create hybrid texts that employ a combination of languages.

Counseling training should draw on more recent models of the writing process (Knorr 2019; Dengscherz 2020) in order to better understand the use of languages in the preliminary talk and to be able to reflect on this with the writers. It is worthwhile discussing with the person seeking advice whether higher-order concerns and heuristic functions are currently impending in the writing process or whether lower-order concerns and formulation issues are involved. The application of certain techniques is contingent upon the relationship between the first and second languages. If writers lack experience and/or self-confidence in selecting a language, this can be addressed initially. In particular, for writers who are uncomfortable with code-switching, particularly if their written language skills in their first language are not at an advanced level, professional documents can serve as parallel texts for practicing formulations and text patterns in a later stage of the process. Writing centers can play a key role in enhancing access to languages and multilingualism in this regard.

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