DE GRUYTER MOUTON EuJAL 2020; 8(2): 233–256

Ingrid de Saint-Georges*, Gabriele Budach and Constanze Tress

"We need to become 'educational chameleons'": from unified to multiple norms in a multilingual and international higher education context

https://doi.org/10.1515/eujal-2020-0011

Abstract: In recent decades, scholars have documented how globalisation and mobility have changed our relationship with linguistic, social and cultural norms. Yet in most educational contexts, evaluation systems still tend to support the teaching of homogeneous knowledge mastered by all, and to portray linguistic standards as key for social mobility. Drawing on qualitative interviews conducted with students on an international and multilingual higher education programme, this paper examines what the students claim they learn from a programme premised instead on the circulation of a multiplicity of norms, standards and practices. The interviews, conducted on the basis of a co-inquiry approach, suggest that the students learn to 1) deal productively and agentively with tensions, 2) rethink their positions and 3) open up to unexpected experiences when teachers support them in navigating multiple norms. In conclusion, the paper highlights how the research elucidates two kinds of norms at play in the programme, institutional and lived norms, and the relationship between them. It also reflects on the utility of discussing multilayered norms (Canagarajah 2006) openly in a globalised higher education context.

Keywords: higher education, multilingualism, norms, evaluation, co-inquiry

Résumé: Ces dernières décennies, les chercheurs ont montré comment la mondialisation et la mobilité modifient nos rapports aux normes linguistiques, sociales et culturelles. De nombreux contextes éducatifs cependant mettent toujours l'accent

***Corresponding author: Prof. Ingrid de Saint-Georges,** University of Luxembourg, Faculty of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences, Esch-sur-Alzette, E-Mail: ingrid.desaintgeorges@uni.lu
Prof. Gabriele Budach, University of Luxembourg, Faculty of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences, Esch-sur-Alzette, E-Mail: gabriele.budach@uni.lu
Constanze Tress, University of Luxembourg, Faculty of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences, Esch-sur-Alzette, E-Mail: constanze.tress@uni.lu

sur l'enseignement de standards linguistiques, considérés comme une clé de la mobilité sociale. Les systèmes d'évaluation encouragent par ailleurs l'enseignement de connaissances homogènes, maîtrisées par tous et identiques pour tous. Dans cet article, nous nous appuyons sur des entretiens qualitatifs réalisés dans un Master international et multilingue caractérisé par la circulation de normes, de standards et de pratiques linguistiques multiples. Les entretiens, réalisés en co-enquête, révèlent que les étudiants ne considèrent pas l'exposition à des pratiques et normes multiples comme un frein à leurs apprentissages. Ils estiment au contraire que cette exposition leur apprend 1) à gérer les tensions de manière productive, 2) à repenser leurs positions et 3) à s'ouvrir à de nouvelles expériences, surtout lorsque les enseignants soutiennent leur réflexion autour des normes. En conclusion, l'article rend plus explicite deux types de normes en jeu dans le programme — les normes institutionnelles et les normes vécues, et leurs relations. Il montre également certaines vertus à discuter ouvertement de la complexité des normes (Canagarajah 2006) dans un enseignement supérieur international et mondialisé.

Zusammenfassung: In den letzten Jahrzehnten habe Forscher sich verstärkt der Frage zugewandt, wie Globalisierung und steigende Mobilität unsere Beziehungen zu sprachlichen, sozialen und kulturellen Normen verändert haben. Dennoch fußen Bewertungssysteme in den meisten Bildungskontexten noch immer auf der Vermittlung und Überprüfung homogener Wissensbestände, sowie auf definierten sprachlichen Standards als Schlüssel zur sozialen Mobilität. Ausgehend von qualitativen Interviews, die mit Studierenden im Rahmen eines internationalen und mehrsprachigen Hochschulstudienganges geführt wurden, analysiert dieser Beitrag die Lernerfahrungen der Befragten in einem Masterprogramm, welches durch eine Vielzahl von Normen, Standards und Praktiken gekennzeichnet ist. Die Auswertung der Interviews durch partizipatorische Methoden legt nahe, dass Studierende lernen, 1) produktiv und bewusst mit Spannungen umzugehen, 2) ihre eigenen Positionierungen zu hinterfragen und 3) sich auf unerwartete Erfahrungen einzulassen, unter der Voraussetzung, dass Lehrende sie dabei unterstützen, Orientierung in den vielfältigen Normerwartungen zu finden. Dieser Beitrag macht zwei für den Studiengang relevante Arten von Normen explizit: institutionelle und gelebte Normen sowie ihre Beziehungen zueinander. Er reflektiert des Weiteren einige der positiven Auswirkungen, die durch eine offene Diskussion über multiple Normen (Canagarajah 2006) in internationalen und globalisierten Hochschullandschaften stimuliert werden kann.

1 Introduction

This paper stems from our experience as teachers and directors of a multilingual, international higher education programme in Luxembourg. In this programme, as in many other higher education programmes today, teachers with a range of international academic experience, linguistic repertoires and teaching styles work with students who speak different languages and have varied academic and cultural backgrounds. The context is different, however, because the programme is based at a multilingual university in which English, French, German and Luxembourgish occupy important positions as languages of work and education. Since it was founded in 2003, the University of Luxembourg's multilingual orientation has attracted scholars with academic training from English-speaking, German, French and other academic traditions. One characteristic of this setting is that no "local" norm or model seems to fully dominate and a multi-normative approach is explicitly valued.

In this paper, we explore the kinds of tensions and learning possibilities that emerge when students move to this multilingual, multi-normative environment to study, asking the question: to what extent is it possible to engage with norms in a higher education environment without necessarily dwelling on one (set of) dominant linguistic or academic norm(s)? Is it possible to encourage reflection about norms, and learning and living with multiple norms? To answer this question, we draw on qualitative interviews originally undertaken by students as part of an assignment. We explore the ways in which the students experience and talk about their multilingual education context, focusing on what they claim to learn when required to navigate a multiplicity of academic and linguistic norms and practices. In the analysis, we describe how the students approach this process, highlighting how they find ways to resolve tensions for themselves and with others. In conclusion, the paper highlights how the research elucidates two kinds of norms at play in the programme, institutional norms (related to academic productions, assignments and evaluation) and lived norms (relate to the experience of belonging or participating in more than one culture), and the relationship between them. We also reflect on the utility of discussing multilayered norms (Canagarajah 2006) openly in a higher education context.

2 Globalisation and education

In recent decades, globalisation and mobility have transformed the face of European cities. Increasing numbers of children and adults have found themselves regularly crossing linguistic, geographical, cultural and ideological borders. As a

result, they have needed to learn more varied rules and conventions to adapt to different contexts and encounters (Duff 2015).

This diversification has affected education, deeply transforming the demographics of classrooms everywhere. Education, however, has been relatively slow to respond to these transformations. For example, while most people would accept that multilingualism and language crossing are normal features of the everyday lives of many citizens (Creese and Blackledge 2010a, Rampton 2011), educational institutions remain largely dominated by monolingual instructional practices. Likewise, online communication has clearly demonstrated that there is a multiplicity of norms and that many ways of being, living, talking and acting coexist in the world. Yet educational institutions have increasingly focused on specific linguistic standards and cultural norms, leading to more institutionalised and standardised pedagogical and evaluation practices.

Several fields are however challenging these views today. Applied linguists and sociolinguists, for example, have begun asking whether it is possible to develop pedagogical practices that might be fairer and more sensitive to the multilingual repertoires and complex sociocultural trajectories of learners. Using terms such as "holistic views of multilingualism in education" (Cenoz and Gorter 2011), "translanguaging pedagogies" (García 2009; Creese and Blackledge 2010b) and "repertoire building approaches" (Kalocsányiová 2017), many initiatives have aimed to bring "the multilingualism of the lifeworld" into educational contexts, "instead of silencing the multiple voices of multilingual [learners]" (Vetter 2013).

In addition, the field of educational assessment and evaluation has also turned linguistic and cultural diversity into a key issue for education in the 21st century (Wyatt-Smith and Cumming 2009). Researchers have started to reconsider age-old questions about access, curriculum and assessment: who gets taught by whom? Whose knowledge is taught and how? What knowledge is equated with achievement? And how do cultural knowledge and linguistic practices mediate individual responses to evaluation (Stobart 2005: 279)?

Overall, these approaches have suggested that ignoring the multilingual and multicultural profiles of learners sets limitations on their learning and gives them an unfair disadvantage (Menken and Shohamy 2015; De Backer et al. 2017; Gorter and Cenoz 2017). They have also developed systematic reflections on the utility, ethics and value of standardised and other forms of testing, raising questions about fairness (Stobart 2005; Gipps and Stobart 2009).

Notwithstanding this renewed and intensified sensitivity to linguistic and cultural diversity in educational research, educational leaders largely seem to "continue to strive for homogeneous knowledge to be owned by all" (Shohamy 2000: 3). Despite a large body of research from post-colonial studies, most classrooms are not yet reflecting on teaching methods that are inclusive of a variety of sys-

tems of norms, languages, varieties, epistemologies and worldviews (Vasconcelos and Martin 2019). Likewise, the mastery of a dominant language is still considered key for educational success and mobility. Provisions for adapting evaluation processes to be fairer to multilingual learners also remain largely relegated to academic literature (Menken and Shohamy 2015; De Backer et al. 2017; Gorter and Cenoz 2017). In this context, educational environments adopting multilingual policies have not occupied centre stage in the educational landscape. As they are rarer, they have also been harder to study empirically. In the following section, we explain how we came to study such an environment. We also clarify how we attempted to take into account the students' perspective, often absent from the discussion in a literature that tends to focus more on the perspective of teaching staff and curricula.

3 Multilingual education at the University of Luxembourg: a case study

Education contexts that embrace bi-, tri- or multilingual language policies are still comparatively fewer than those that adopt more monolingual policies (Cenoz and Gorter 2011; Gorter and Cenoz 2017). The challenge for researchers interested in what is learned in a more multilingual context is to identify suitable spaces of inquiry. One area which provides such research material is higher education. With the process of internationalisation of universities gaining strength worldwide (Knight 2004; Jones 2013), learners and curricula have diversified. As bi- or multilingual programmes have multiplied and student mobility has increased, researchers of higher education have discussed the challenges and opportunities associated with multilingual education (Gajo et al. 2013; Byram et al. 2019). Much research on the impacts of internationalisation in higher education has also pointed to the unifying – rather than diversifying – effect of changing relations and dependencies between universities and structural entities outside academia, as well as the hegemony of English and English-speaking programmes and research (e.g. Kirkpatrick 2011; Zajda and Rust 2016).

Our own research has been influenced by our experience teaching and/or directing a trilingual[1] international and interdisciplinary Master programme fo-

1 The three languages of instruction are English, French and German. To be admitted to the programme, English is required at level C1, either French or German at level B1, and the third language (French/German) at level A (levels as defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)).

cused on learning and communication in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.[2] It is important to clarify various contextual elements to understand the particularities of this programme. First, the programme is based at a multilingual university,[3] where French, English and German are languages of instruction, research and administration, and Luxembourgish is mandatory for specific courses of study, such as teacher training and Luxembourgish studies, and is used for various events, meetings and daily interactions for some staff.

This complex multilingual situation reflects the overall social context of Luxembourg. The country also has an official trilingual policy (Luxembourgish, French and German) (Horner and Weber 2008), stemming from its location bordering France, Belgium and Germany.[4] Recent statistics also show that nearly 48 % of the population are non-nationals (STATEC 2019). Growing numbers of Portuguese- and English-speakers and migrants from the former Yugoslavia have settled in the country in recent decades, together with more recent arrivals from Arabic-speaking countries as a result of migratory movements (STATEC 2019). Additionally, a large number of primarily French-speaking cross-border workers enter Luxembourg daily, making up nearly 44 % of the workforce in Luxembourg (STATEC 2018). Yet despite the rapidly changing population, there remains a "stereotypical model" of Luxembourg's linguistic landscape as stable and composed of speakers who are equally and near-natively proficient in the three official languages (De Korne 2012).

The Master programme investigated here, however, does not presuppose this stereotypical model of near-native proficiency. It might be better characterised as adopting an "inclusive multilingualism" model. Backus et al. (2013) describe how in such a model, people make use of a wide variety of strategies to navigate the expectations of the context and to communicate with others in the various languages in circulation. In our programme this means that students and teachers may use a shared language or mother tongue as a *lingua franca*, for example, and make use of code-switching, translanguaging, translation, interpretation and *lingua receptiva* in their daily activities (Backus et al. 2013; Ten Thije et al. 2017). English also plays an important part in the curriculum as a language of instruction, as the language in which most student write their assignments, and as the language students most often use among themselves or with teachers.

---

2 Master in Learning and Communication in Multilingual and Multicultural Contexts, University of Luxembourg.

3 https://wwwen.uni.lu/university/about_the_university. (Last accessed 31st July 2020)

4 Note that while all three languages – Luxembourgish, French and German – are "official languages", Luxembourgish is given special status as the national language, while French and German are dubbed judicial and administrative languages.

4 Methodological framework

4.1 Context of the study

In the Master's programme, critically reflecting on the experience of being a multilingual learner in a multilingual context is central to the curriculum.[5] One way to engage in this critical reflection lies in research-led teaching and cooperative inquiry (Heron and Reason 1997; Pearce 2008). Part of a family of participatory approaches that have developed in different disciplines since the 1960s (Pearce 2008), cooperative inquiry is a way of bringing a group together to explore issues of concern and interest to all, often with a view to using the inquiry to bring about change.

Cooperative inquiry can take several forms, depending on the objectives and timeframe for the process. In our case, we made use of a semester-long introductory course (spring 2019) teaching students how to conduct research interviews as a means of exploring the topic of fairness in assessment and evaluation in the Master's programme.[6] This topic was perhaps an unusual choice to discuss in the context of higher education. The goal was not only to obtain feedback about whether or not students felt fairly treated, but also to reflect with the students on the existence of a multiplicity of norms and power hierarchies in the assessment process and to discuss how norms may affect students differently.

The students began by preparing an interview schedule in English with a list of questions and themes to explore ideas about fairness in assessment. They then interviewed their peers (each of the 27 students on the course interviewed a second-year fellow student, or if not available, a first-year student) to find out their views. In the second phase of the project, the students transcribed[7] and analysed the responses. They also shared their results with the class. A final group discussion enabled them to identify lessons learned from the research. Although no specific instruction was given to conduct the interviews in English, they were

5 https://wwwen.uni.lu/studies/fhse/master_in_learning_and_communication_in_multilingual_and_multicultural_contexts. (Last accessed 31st July 2020)

6 This course was designed after reading a critical appraisal of the experience of international students at the University of Luxembourg by a former student on the programme (Escobar 2019).

7 The students used simple transcription conventions: (.) intonation falling, (,) small pause, (..) longer pause, (xxxx) unintelligible. The interviewers had to transcribe recordings that were sometimes in a L2, or L3 language for them. The interviewees also had different degrees of proficiency in the language of the interview. We kept the transcriptions as they were originally provided by the students, editing only for basic typos to make the transcription more intelligible.

nearly all carried out in that language, with just two exceptions (one interview in French and one in German).

4.2 Analytical standpoint

The description above makes it clear that the data was constructed in many complex ways. First, the topic and context of discussion were largely suggested by the professor who also provided a specific critical framework. Second, the students conducted their interviews as a piece of coursework. Both interviewers and interviewees were thus well aware of the intended audience (the professor, programme director and other students in the class). Third, the questions were predetermined. The interview schedule dictated what topics would be discussed and also, to some extent, set the scope of what could be said about them.

In this context of inquiry, students' statements cannot therefore be taken as direct reflections of their views on the topic explored. Rather, in line with constructivist and interpretative epistemologies, we understand that the interviews were also the scenes of local identity constructions, performance and stance-taking. They also reflected wider educational and societal ideologies and discourses (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012).

To analyse the interviews, we first read them all, identifying sequences with metalinguistic comments about types of evaluation, assessment and norms. We initially worked individually on the material, using a variety of techniques and technologies (MAXQDA, f4analyse and traditional pen-and-paper methods) to identify themes and investigate how speakers positioned themselves with regard to these themes. We also examined the arguments used by interviewees to support their positions, beliefs and stances (Talja 1999).

In what follows, we discuss excerpts relevant to these issues of learning. What we wish to share in this analysis is a reflection on how students relate to their experience of encountering and learning to live with changing norms after transitioning to a new country and university context. We do not claim that the picture presented here is complete, that the processes highlighted are unique to our programme, or that the findings are unproblematic. We offer the analysis, however, as a starting point for further questions and reflections.

5 Experiencing messiness

In this section, we focus primarily on how the students describe their experience of encountering multiple norms. First, we outline how students compare their

previous experience to the experience of beginning the multilingual Master programme. Second, we explore how they qualify this new experience of encountering a non-unified culture of teaching and assessment. Third, we examine how a different study background is initially presented as creating differences with regard to access, confusion and anxiety.

5.1 The initial shock

For almost all students, beginning the multilingual Master programme was described throughout the interviews as initially constituting a significant departure from their previous experience. Any transition from one institutional context to another, and from one language environment to another, might involve elements of shock and require complex adaptation. With this programme, moving from environments with one specific language of instruction to a programme requiring some level of working knowledge in three languages undoubtedly represents a particular challenge. But it was not only the language requirements that were different for many students starting this programme; there was also a salient difference in academic culture. As several students, particularly those from Eastern European backgrounds, explained, their past studies were based on a view of learning conceptualised as the repetition of pre-existing design. The students were expected to rehearse and reproduce the form, genre convention or content found in books or presented by the professor. Assessment typically took place through oral exams and classes were professor-led. The goal was not to produce new knowledge in the examined work, as illustrated in excerpt (1) and (2) (our emphasis):

(1) And back in Armenia, I had to, for example, **learn a whole theoretical book by heart** before I went to the exam. An then I would go and, you know, just throw up (laugh) this knowledge which didn't really belong to me, but I just learned by heart.

(2) And, also, the professors back in Sofia (...) they expected from us to say and to express exactly the same thing they gave us during the classes. So, **we had strict guidelines** and we had to read to repeat to remember the things we've been discussing in class. And then to, just to reproduce them again during the exams. During the oral exams, **we were not allowed to give our own opinions or ideas and thoughts**, to share **or ask questions**.

These excerpts highlight an emphasis on "book learning", professor behaviour as a model, and the need for students to follow strict guidelines in a reproductive mode. Our aim here is not to comment on or judge any particular teaching style or method of assessment. Rather, it is to acknowledge what kinds of educational

cultures students experienced before joining the Master programme. The highlighted elements are important in that they contributed to forming learning routines that were seen in those contexts as leading to educational success, and which students had incorporated into their image of a "model student".

For students who learned the ropes, the predictability of the system meant that they developed an understanding of what kinds of behaviours or products were expected of them to enable them to become and remain successful in the system. The following example suggests that navigating predictable systems can feel very comfortable, as such systems offer a sense of stability once a student has learned the required tools and techniques and how to navigate them successfully:

(3) But **the good thing about it was you really knew what they were expecting**. Kind of. And in the US, it was so clear what they were expecting. Like, they really gave you a list of things you have to do. And like, if you do this and this, you're going to get this grade. And if you do that you're going to get this grade or that's going to be, like I don't know, like minus points if you don't hand in that homework until this deadline and stuff like that. So that was super clear, super strict, but **very easy to meet the,** the (..) what is called – the **standard**

Many students referred to the existence of "a standard" – in the singular – in their past experiences. This standard was to some extent identifiable and those able to meet it would accrue advantages. What is important here is not whether standards in other contexts were indeed singular or monolithic, but rather that students remembered them as such, often in contrast with their experience on this programme.

5.2 Encountering a non-unified culture of assessment

Many students found encountering a system that was quite different from their previous academic experience to be disorientating. Importantly, it was not only language and the use of three languages of instruction that made things challenging for the students on this programme. There was also a variety of teaching staff, some of whom had been educated and worked in different higher education systems where they were exposed to different local norms, experienced different teaching styles and developed their own views on teaching practices. To be clear, this situation is not exclusive to this programme, as teaching staff are becoming increasingly diverse all over the world. However, the variety of approaches, norms and expectations that professors here seemed to have developed was noticeable for students and created an apparent sense of "messiness", as illustrated below:

(4) A: **how can you say how grading works, how teaching works** if all your professors (laugh) are from whatever countries exist, which is very cool and I like it and, and, yes but **there's no such a culture behind it.** Which is why it can also be kind of **messy** I guess because **you never know what to expect**. So yeah, that's something surprising because **it's so young and it has no (.) specific culture** (laugh) (xxx) such a diverse culture that you can't really grasp it and you don't really know how to start with it. Yeah there's really no way to understand it.

This student highlights the fact that there does not seem to be a unified culture of teaching, and that the expectations of teaching staff vary. Interestingly, the student attributes this to the young age of the university, implying that (unified) norms may and probably will emerge and solidify with time, as if this were an unavoidable and necessary product of institutionalisation. And maybe this is the case to a certain extent. For the moment, however, the students perceive a kind of "void" or absence of a single local norm. The current situation is perceived as the coexistence of an incoherent variety of different norms and expectations that is experienced as "messy".

5.3 Feeling unprepared

While some students found the existence of different norms to be challenging, others felt that the variety of students' prior trajectories was important to consider. In particular, certain backgrounds and experiences did not always seem to leave students prepared to grapple with new normative practices. A student explained this by describing a friend's experience on the programme:

(5) K: For example, a friend of mine, she had a different kind of study background. So like, for example, writing article, writing papers and stuff. Either she never did, or she did in a different way. And, so **for her, it was really**, really **hard to meet the standards** because she just didn't know how to do it, because nobody told her.

The excerpt shows that difference in "study background" (meaning here differences in practices of academic literacy, particularly writing) can constitute a challenge for a programme that requires writing a variety of academic and personal essays – a genre unfamiliar to a number of the students. Secondly, the student implies that in any new context, what works best is to have a clear explanation of what is expected (ideally in light of knowledge about students' previous academic experiences, especially as related to writing practices).

Students also point out that teaching staff might lack an understanding of how students relate to the assignments proposed and hold assumptions that do not reflect the reality experienced by the students:

(6) K. it's not really explained. Because, yeah, it is assumed that you kind of already know. Which is totally understandable.
I: Right.
K: But for the students. **It's very frustrating and very challenging, because they just don't know how to.** And then **they feel** like **they're not good enough**, because they are not smart enough, or they don't understand. **But they just don't have the tools** how to do it.

In other words, teaching staff may be assuming, for example, that students are familiar with certain kinds of assignments, or that their ways of doing things are known and clear, without understanding the difficulties this can create for students.

6 Dealing with multiple norms

Identifying norms – in the plural – seems to be very complex and to require more work than having to learn just one standard. However, students also suggested that there were some conditions which eased the challenge and which made students feel that they were being evaluated fairly most or all of the time, despite the heterogeneous context.

The first important ingredient was the *flexible multilingual approach* (Weber 2014) adopted in the programme. Such an approach can only be implemented if teaching staff are sensitive to the multilingualism of the students and open to a more flexible use of their repertoires:

(7) S: well. you know for me I think the professors actually know, most of them know that not all of us have one of the three languages of our Master as a mother tongue. So, this is a foreign language or second or third language for us. So I think that they have that in mind.
S: I don't feel somehow evaluated in a bad way because of my language skills.

(8) I think in this programme professors are usually flexible with languages and there is no problem if your language is not perfect. The most important thing is your ideas and not how you choose words.

Rather than paying attention only or primarily to linguistic norms, students feel that teaching staff are more concerned with content in assessment. In the programme, there is indeed some leniency with form and more attention to content, especially in the early semesters. As the learners move towards completion of their Master's dissertation at the end of the programme, higher linguistic standards are expected. In other words, teaching staff bear in mind that the academic repertoires of the students are very much in development.

A consequence of this approach towards linguistic norms plays out in a way that encourages students to make use of all or at least larger parts of their linguistic repertoires. This allows for more differentiated, individualised *repertoire building* (Busch 2012). Since teaching staff are multilingual, with more diverse than unified repertoires, students are offered a range of possibilities for using their linguistic resources, for instance by choosing the language of their assignments. They reported that this was an important factor in helping them meet the demands of professors. Below, a student describes the palette of languages she uses within and across her courses:

(9) R: Okay. Do you prefer to write in English? Or maybe do you have enough other languages that you are proficient in?
C: Okay for this Master I wrote in Italian once because the professor, yeah, she could understand Italian so she told me that I can write in Italian. And I tried in German but for only, you know, on Moodle for the questions, for Professor xxxx I tried once? And the presentation in German and French not yet (laughs). And English, or English I think yes, English the most. I think I'm more proficient in. But, I mean, for the other languages, yes. Also because French I can speak for example in class, but to write is a problem. German the opposite I can write good, but speak.. xxxxx
(laughs).
R: But maybe speaking Italian helps for French? Or do you think it's different ?
C: For me no. Many people tell yes, but, for me no (laughs). No but, I prefer to write in English than Italian for example. It's more difficult to write in Italian because I'm not- I wasn't used to write in Italian.
R: academic writ- academic writing ?
C: Yeah academic writing. So I prefer in English

The student mentions her use of Italian, German, English and French. She reports on differences in her language abilities and explains how she selects different languages for oral and written production. When writing an assignment, she prefers her stronger language, English. She feels comfortable speaking in class in French, but writing in French proves to be more difficult to her. Finally, when asking and posting questions on Moodle, the interactive platform used by teaching staff to communicate with students, she feels comfortable writing in a language in which she feels less confident, but for which the online environment of the Moodle platform offers a good opportunity for practice. Drawing on many of the resources of her repertoires, she is able to choose the best way to let the professor see what she knows and can do.

Finally, even though there is no top-down injunction to do so, there seems to be a shared sensitivity among teaching staff to factor the multilingual profile of the learner into their assessments. Professors seem to place greater value on learners' ability to read, write and speak in different languages, rather than viewing learners' still developing repertoires as a shortcoming or a problem. They see the

plurilingual profile of learners as an added complexity that needs to be attended to and supported, even during the assessment process (Gorter and Cenoz 2017). For many students, this flexibility is a crucial way to achieve fair assessment in a multilingual context:

(10) I: So what ideas or suggestions do you have for equitable assessment evaluation or grading in a multilingual and multicultural programme? Do you know of any practices that work well in your view?
F: Look I think it's **impossible** for such versatile programme as we are in (..) **for all the students to have the same level of linguistic like competency**, **in three languages**. So, the most plausible scenario is the one that is actually happening right now with the programme, that some people are good either at French or English or German so I don't think the language should be the determining factor when it comes to evaluating a paper. Again I think the **content it's the most important thing of evaluation** and if we're talking about equitable assessment that should be the most important criteria because if we're, if we want to talk about unequal linear process of assessing a paper then it should be based on, on things other than language. Because students do not have the same linguistic competency.

It is interesting that this student describes the programme as "versatile", apparently referring to the various levels of ability in the three languages of instruction displayed by students on the programme. This raises the question of whether and how different levels of linguistic ability could and should be taken into account by teaching staff and in teaching. The student here suggests prioritising content over language in students' texts and productions. This is difficult, as we know, since the form in which ideas are presented often affects the impression of what is being said and how it is understood and received by the reader/audience as more or less competent, eloquent, well-articulated – and convincing. Several possibilities could be considered to address this problem. Teaching staff might divert attention away from language and linguistic norms by offering students the option of including multimodal content in assignments or by reaffirming the option for students to use different languages for different tasks. Students might be offered additional support in academic writing. Another important, potentially controversial, option is to consider each student's work individually, taking into account their learning trajectory, rather than measuring a piece by a second- or third-language learner against and with the same measure as a piece by a first-language speaker and writer.

(11) R.: So what would you change in the process of evaluation?
M.: Not much. **I think it is good that the professors take an essay individually. They do not compare to the absolute level, you know, so that for example I was not always compared to the American, who obviously writes way better than I**

> **did**. And I think that is amazing. So, I hope that it is still that way, I think that is the best way to do it.

Such a view and practice of course raises fundamental questions about assessment and would be impossible in a system that requires anonymised marking. We would like to highlight here that we are only reporting on the students' views and their perception of how assessment is being practised in the programme. Their views are very partial and may not reflect or align with the views of other players in the programme, such as teaching staff. We have not included the views of teaching staff on their own practices and therefore do not wish to make any claims on their behalf. However, we find it interesting that students generally agree with a practice that seems to take into account individual pathways of learning, language levels and complex configurations of ability that would be neglected in a monolithic, strictly standardised system of evaluating work.

7 Learning from navigating multiple norms

In the end, despite the expressed frustrations and complexities associated with navigating multiple norms, the interviews show that the students see the effort invested as being worthwhile and potentially even beneficial for them and their learning.

7.1 Dealing agentively with tensions

For many students, there was very much a feeling that the confusion about new norms could be addressed. As one student explains,

> (12) it took me like the first I would say **the first semester it took me really to understand the formal informal structure of the requirements for assignment** that are required here at the university. So each teacher, each module, they have different expectations to the assignment.

This student seems to suggest that it is possible to learn the new ropes, as in any other situation of transition. More generally in the program, students gradually seem to discover a multiplicity of norms that are understood to coexist without any single standard prevailing. This is a complex challenge for students, as it requires them to adapt to heterogeneity on different levels. It demands flexibility to cope with the heterogeneity of individual professors' expectations, the heterogeneity of language use and the heterogeneity of content. These three elements

might also exist in other contexts. However, finding a “common language” on this programme, as one student describes it, seems to encompass negotiations around (multilingual) language ability and norms, knowledge and academic content, and genres and styles of writing. As one student states, “in our assignments we have to find a common language with the professor – more than in pure linguistic terms (…) we need to become ‘educational chameleons’”.

Another student similarly felt that the way in which space is made for multiple norms was ultimately positive:

(13) A: afterwards, once I got used to this, what they’re looking for, what they really want, I started going with the flow according to the requirements of the assignment. And it’s, it’s been going off, really, good, yeah.

This quote and the previous one imply that students are taking an active role in working through the “messiness”, being more attentive to particular settings and working to understand the requirements in a given situation. One student explicitly notes that the need to get to grips with the situation pushes students to ask more questions, to take on more agentive roles in the classroom:

(14) The best way is ask questions, questions, questions, questions. Ask the professor what exactly they’re expecting. Become clear what they want and clarify for yourself. Every professor will have a slightly different idea.(…) And of course, It will be a task but you want to know, how can I do it the best way? How can I do it the way the professor wants to ask? And I’ve never had an experience where the professor is not responsive to more questions.

Overall, students have quite varied language skills, disciplinary backgrounds and past trajectories of learning, which means that they do not come to their courses and assignments with the same tools. On top of this, the guidelines are not strict or fixed across the programme. However, many students found that they were eventually able to make sense of things, to “go with the flow”, and to do so as active participants in the classroom. And so, even as most students report feeling bewildered at first by the differences between their Bachelor and Master studies, the heterogeneous demands of their teachers and the linguistic variety, most discover a way to adapt to the situation, the motivations behind it and the rewards associated with it.

7.2 Rethinking one's position

Another dimension stressed by the students is that the effort of getting to grips with a variety of norms can create a different sense of belonging that is not always possible to build in other contexts more dominated by one set of cultural values:

(15) B: **here, everyone's coming from outside. So it makes a huge difference.** ... But "integration" seems more complicated here. I think **in Italy it was easier because then I knew the rules, and I knew the culture.** And I **was just like, "okay here is Italy, and I'm in Italy. So I like these people's cultural values, or this and that." And it was like, easier to handle. Here you go around, you meet someone you don't even know how many times to kiss them on the cheeks.** (laugh)

This quote is interesting in two respects: not because of the rather stereotypical and questionable assumption about Italy and its presumably unified culture; rather, what is striking is the student's experience of the environment in Luxembourg where different sets of norms coexist and need to be worked out in interactions, even simple exchanges like meeting and greeting a new person. This general perception of diversity and a multiplicity of norms is not interesting as an absolute statement, but rather in the way that it frames the student's overall experience of living and studying in a space described as one in which "everyone is coming from the outside". Of course, this programme includes students from Luxembourg who were born and grew up in the country. However, the impression that prevails – even for the Luxembourg-born students – is one that students perceive as differing quite fundamentally from their previous experience in that it feels much more heterogeneous than homogeneous. All people sharing the same classroom here are perceived as coming from "the outside", since the vast majority of the students were indeed not born in Luxembourg and came to the country for study or work, to accompany family members or to try to build a new life and professional career. Despite the presence of some local Luxembourgish students, there is little sense of a shared local norm which would be modelled by dominant ways of speaking and acting. This seems to have some impact on how difference and being different is felt by the students overall:

(16) I: Have you ever felt different in class for cultural or other reasons?
A: (5s) (laugh) that's a difficult question because... we're SO DIVERSE ... I think it's like fifteen nationalities in there. So for cultural reasons**, I don't feel that different, [...] no not really because everyone is different. [...]**
I: Do you think it's helpful that the university is so multicultural and especially this programme, to help make students feel more comfortable and not as isolated for being from a different place?

A: Yes definitely. I mean because in Switzerland, **in high school** I remember that we had ummm…**people coming for exchange years** from the U.S., from southern American countries and **they were always outsiders**. They were included, obviously in some way and they were, it was always very interesting**, everyone wanted to know more about them. But at the end of the day they always remained the exchange student**. And **here** even though **we had exchange students** from Russia, **they were just part of the class, there was no difference between them or us**, so that was very nice, yeah.

This last quote suggests that when there is a dominant culture that is perceived by the majority as the norm, students with differing trajectories or profiles are singled out by the majority group as different. However, these perceptions of difference seem to disappear when a clearly identifiable local norm is missing, and difference generally tends to be framed differently, at least in certain areas and ways. This seems to be helpful in facilitating the emergence of a collective identity, despite the very individual and idiosyncratic life trajectories, backgrounds and experiences of the students, perhaps all the more so because of the effort required to grapple with each other's perspectives.

Perhaps more importantly, the students' views show that they learn to situate themselves in a wider array of perspectives and to relativise their own positions. In the following passage, a student explains how the Master made her aware of her own position in ways she had not previously experienced:

(17) A: (laugh) a lot because discussions usually start with, "so, in Switzerland we usually do it in this and this and this way," and then someone else, "in China, we do it this way" and it makes sense, right? Everyone has to be aware of that because your personal opinion is not valued as such, but is only valued in its specific context, like where you're from. If you want to say something you always have to think **"why do I say this, or why does this person say this to me, where does she come from, where did she learn, why"** (laugh) so I think especially now at the University of Luxembourg in this very, huh, multicultural environment it's very important that you're aware of this at all times basically.

This quote points to two interesting issues. By getting to know and learning to appreciate other students' views, students become more aware of their own cultural values and positions. At the same time, they start to reflect on and hypothesise about the viewpoints expressed by others, situating these views geographically, culturally and socially based on what they know about their peers and trying to find reasons, motivations and grounding in what they know about these other nations (often equating the nation with a homogeneous culture). While in this example the nation or reference to a particular country of origin serves as a basis for (inter-) cultural comparison, nationhood and citizenship are not the only frames of reference:

(18) A: Even though I'm only a citizen of one country, I feel more multicultural and I became aware that I'm actually multilingual

This is when social identities often associated with categories of nation or national languages start to become blurred. That is not to say that feelings and awareness of the nation as a social category are not emphasised by other students on the programme, but what is offered is a dialogue about these categories and what they mean for oneself and for others.

7.3 Opening up to unexpected experiences

The heterogeneity that students experience is not limited to linguistic diversity or the variety of content and expectations. It also has to do with the structure of the programme, which incorporates different strands and interdisciplinary approaches as well as a variety of assessment formats, evaluation practices and pedagogical methods to engage students with learning. In particular, the programme involves a great deal of small-scale empirical project work for the students, which suggests an emphasis on practice:

(19) But the assignments here are more practical. They're less theoretical. And **they don't build towards one certain thing, it's more diverse**. My previous Master was just going towards the same direction. I had my idea in my mind by the end of the first term, and then it was just focusing on what you want to write and all the assignments were built around the same idea. But it's nice here because **you acquire experience to be creative** and things like that.

It seems that this student had formed quite a clear idea of what her previous Master programme was about after one year and that she maintained this idea until the end of the programme. In the new programme, the orientation seems less straightforward, which gave the student an awareness and ability to remain open, to expect change and to feel better prepared to incorporate new ideas. The focus on small-scale project work also pushes the student into a more experiential, experimental, immersive mode of learning.

If we want to consider that as an achievement in education, it seems to be difficult to quantify with grading and numbers. The "messiness of the system" or the multiplicity of content, norms and expectations, including linguistic complexity, seems to be able to transform students' initial state of "shock" into an ability to receive difference more positively, as a "surprise", potentially opening up new possibilities or new trajectories:

(20) S: So yeah, I had my expectations and they were not all fulfilled, but then on the other hand, other things came up, which surprised me or which gave me other ideas, or I don't know, experience

(21) S: I also feel, on the one hand a bit confused, but (...) it's kind of good as well, because you **grow** within that Master. And for me, it's more a life changing thing. It's also quite nice to have a little bit more freedom, and to find your way within the little chaos maybe and to see what options you have, which opportunities you really want to do [...] I still don't know what I will do after the end of this programme, but **I fully enjoy the process of learning.**

What caught our attention in this quote was that the student said the state of confusion made her grow. While this is surely often the case, what is more remarkable is the reflective stance of the student here, the ability to acknowledge confusion – generally felt as a rather unpleasant and destabilising state of emotion – as a source of growth. We do not want to ascribe this as a merit of this programme specifically, but rather as a phenomenon that happened here and in contrast to a previous experience set in another context. The second point which deserves a mention is that this attitude also seems to have led to a different kind of trust: trust in the process and allowing oneself to enjoy the process of learning.

8 Concluding discussion

In this paper we explored a multilingual, multi-normative higher education environment. The programme under study was also characterised by a non-unified culture of assessment and by varied pedagogical practices. Exploring this environment was an opportunity to engage with the voices and experiences of highly mobile students in the globalised higher education arena whose voices do not often occupy centre stage in research on multilingualism in education.

The paper began by examining how the students dealt with a non-unified academic culture. By conducting their own interview-based inquiry, the students were encouraged to reflect on the sensitive topic of evaluation and assessment, an issue that raises questions directly related to norms and fairness. An interview guide was prepared with the students with several goals: understanding where the students came from and any tensions between attending the Master and their previous university experiences; investigating whether students felt disadvantaged or unfairly treated in the multilingual and multi-normative system of the Master; gaining insights into the strategies used by students to deal with the variety of languages and the various tasks, assignments and requirements set by their professors.

From this initial analysis, a number of elements stood out. The first is that navigating *multilayered norms* (Canagarajah 2006) was complex and challenging, but was not "as confusing as it sounded" (Canagarajah 2006). After the initial shock and transition period, the students claimed to have found their way around the multiple expectations. Second, to cope with their confusion, the students claimed to have developed specific *strategies*, namely not attempting to reproduce one "model system" at all costs but identifying different ways in which academic practices could be organised within the programme. They used their agency to gain more explicit information, their sociolinguistic skills to engage with course material, and their power of asking questions to ensure that they were not left behind. Third, the students suggested that dealing with a non-unified culture of assessment was facilitated when a number of conditions were in place. For example: the teachers focused on the students' strengths rather than tinkering with their weaknesses; they understood their trajectory of learning and the need for time to develop the skills needed to meet requirements; and they respected their multilingual profiles by adopting a flexible approach to multilingualism. They also factored in students' language levels and offered a range of assignments, not all language-based, so that students could demonstrate what they knew in multiple forms.

Beyond these findings, our journey with the students demonstrated that two kinds of norms were operating in the programme – institutional and lived norms. While the conversation started by exploring the impact of institutional norms in enforcing certain standards and how grading scripts and assessment methods could generate specific inequalities on a programme where students were studying in a third, fourth or fifth language in which they had not necessarily been academically trained, discussions later veered towards lived norms – the varieties of ways in which cultures are organised and how certain modes of talking, acting and being are valued more in one context or another. It became clear that if we want to be an inclusive multilingual and multicultural learning community, we need to address the complex links between multilayered linguistic norms and cultural practices more closely.

The cooperative inquiry thus created a space to discuss institutional norms with strong implications for the trajectory of learners. The discussion did not lead to a collapse in norms; the students did not demand that any notion of grades be abandoned, and academic and linguistic norms were in no way delegitimised. It did, however, highlight how some norms can advantage or disadvantage some learners at times, making them feel empowered or disempowered. We were able to discuss these challenges in an open way, because on a trilingual international programme everyone had experienced feeling less proficient in one of the languages of the programme, feeling lost with regard to new expectations and re-

quirements, or being asked to reflect repeatedly about their experiences in light of the course content and reading requirements.

In the end, perhaps what was gained from this joint inquiry was a more critical and collective understanding of how norms and standards frame our successes and failures. It also opened up a space to discuss and examine the context and assumptions behind assessment and evaluation practices.

9 References

Backus, Ad, Durk Gorter, Karlfried Knapp, Rosita Schjerve-Rindler, Jos Swanenberg, Jan D. ten Thije & Eva Vetter. 2013. Inclusive multilingualism: Concept, modes and implications. *European Journal of Applied Linguistics* 1(2). 179–215.

Busch, Brigitta. 2012. Building on Heteroglossia and Heterogeneity: The Experience of a Multilingual Classroom. In Adrian Blackledge & Angela Creese (eds.), *Heteroglossia as Practice and Pedagogy* (Educational Linguistics 20), 21–40. Heidelberg: Springer.

Byram, Michael, Adelheid Hu & Mizanur Rahman. 2019. Are researchers in Europe European researchers? A study of doctoral researchers at the University of Luxembourg. *Studies in Higher Education* 44(3). 486–498.

Canagarajah, A. Suresh. 2006. Changing Communicative needs, Revised Assessment Objectives: Testing English as an International Language. *Language Assessment Quarterly* 3(3). 229–242.

Cenoz, Jasone & Durk Gorter. 2011. A holistic approach to multilingual education: Introduction. *The Modern Language Journal* 95(3). 339–343.

Creese, Angela & Adrian Blackledge. 2010a. Translanguaging in the bilingual classroom: A pedagogy for learning and teaching? *The Modern Language Journal* 94. 103–115.

Creese, Angela & Adrian Blackledge. 2010b. Towards a sociolinguistics of superdiversity. *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft* 13(4). 549–572.

De Backer, Fauve, Piet Van Avermaet & Stef Slembrouck. 2017. Schools as laboratories for exploring multilingual assessment policies and practices. *Language and Education* 31(3). 217–230.

De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2012). *Analyzing Narrative: Discourse and Sociolinguistic Perspectives.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

De Korne, Haley. 2012. Towards new ideologies and pedagogies of multilingualism: Innovations in interdisciplinary language education in Luxembourg. *Language and Education* 26(6). 479–500.

Duff, Patricia A. 2015. Transnationalism, multilingualism, and identity. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 35. 57–80.

Escobar Gómez, Mariana. 2019. "Decolonial Responsibility within International Higher Education: Institutional Commitment and Resistance Strategies". *Voces y Silencios. Revista Latinoamericana de Educación* 10(1). 113–126.

Gajo, Laurent, Anne Grobet, Cecilia Serra, Gabriela Steffen, Gabriele Müller & Anne-Claude Berthoud. 2013. Plurilingualisms and knowledge construction in Higher Education. In Anne-Claude Berthoud, François Grin & Georges Lüdi (eds.), *Exploring the Dynamics of Multilingualism. The Dylan Project* (Multilingualism and Diversity Management 2), 279–298. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

García, Ofelia. 2009. *Bilingual education in the 21st Century: A global perspective*. Oxford: Wiley.

Gipps, Caroline & Gordon Stobart. 2009. Fairness in assessment. In Claire Wyatt-Smith & Joy Cumming (eds.), *Educational Assessment in the 21st Century. Connecting Theory and Practice*, 105–118. Dordrecht: Springer.

Gorter, Durk & Jasone Cenoz. 2017. Language education policy and multilingual assessment. *Language and Education* 31(3). 231–248.

Heron, John & Peter Reason. 1997. A participatory inquiry paradigm. *Qualitative Inquiry* 3(3). 274 –294.

Horner, Kristine and Jean Jacques Weber. 2008. The language situation in Luxembourg. *Current Issues in Language Planning* 9(1). 69–128.

Jones, Elspeth. 2013. Internationalization and student learning outcomes. In Hans de Wit (ed.), *An Introduction to Higher Education Internationalization*, 107–116. Milan: Vita e Pensiero.

Kalocsányiová, Erika. 2017. Towards a repertoire-building approach: multilingualism in language classes for refugees in Luxembourg. *Language and Intercultural Communication* 17(4). 474–493.

Kirkpatrick, Andy. 2011. *Internationalization or Englishization: Medium of Instruction in Today's Universities*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Education. Centre for Governance and Citizenship.

Knight, Jane. 2004. Internationalization remodeled: Definition, approaches, and rationales. *Journal of Studies in International Education* 8(1). 5–31.

Menken, Kate & Elana Shohamy. 2015. Invited colloquium on negotiating the complexities of multilingual assessment, AAAL Conference 2014. *Language Teaching* 48(3). 421–425.

Pearce, Jenny. 2008. *'We Make Progress Because We are Lost': Critical Reflections on Co-Producing Knowledge as a Methodology for Researching Non-Governmental Public Action.* (Non-Governmental Public Action Programme Working Paper series, paper 27). London: School of Economics.

Rampton, Ben. 2011. From 'Multi-ethnic adolescent heteroglossia' to 'Contemporary urban vernaculars'. *Language & Communication* 31(4). 276–294.

Shohamy, Elana. 2000. Educational assessment in a multicultural society: issues and challenges. Paper presented at the 26th IAEA Conference, Jerusalem, 14–19 May.

STATEC. 2018. Rapport Travail et Cohésion Sociale: L'état social et le bien-être de la société Luxembourgeoise. Analyse 2. Institut National de la statistique et des études économiques du Grand-Duché du Luxembourg

STATEC. 2019. Population by sex and nationality on 1st January (x 1000) 1981, 1991, 2000–2019. *Institut National de la statistique et des études économiques de Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*.

Stobart, Gordon. 2005. Fairness in multicultural assessment systems. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice* 12(3). 275–287.

Talja, Sanna. 1999. Analyzing Qualitative Interview Data: The Discourse Analytic Method. *Library and Information Science Research*, 21 (4). 459–477.

Ten Thije, Jan D., Charlotte Gooskens, Frans Daems, Leonie Cornips & Mieke Smits. 2017. Lingua receptiva: Position paper on the European commission's skills agenda. *European Journal of Applied Linguistics* 5(1). 141–146.

Vasconcelos, Andrea Blair & Fran Martin. 2019. *Plurality, plurilogicality and pluriversality: A Literature Review. A review fort the Creativity and Emergent Educational-Future Network (CEEN)*. Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter. https://www.academia.edu/39

996296/Plurality_plurilogicality_and_pluriversality_A_literature_review (accessed 13 February 2020).
Vetter, Eva. 2013. Where policy doesn't meet life-world practice – the difficulty of creating the multilingual European. *European Journal of Applied Linguistics* 1(1). 83–102.
Weber, Jean-Jacques. 2014. *Flexible Multilingual Education. Putting Children's Needs First.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
Wyatt-Smith, Claire & J. Joy Cumming (eds.). 2009. *Educational Assessment in the 21st Century. Connecting Theory and Practice*. Dordrecht: Springer.
Zajda, Joseph & Val Rust (eds.). 2016. *Globalisation and Higher Education Reforms*. Berlin & Heidelberg: Springer.