

Micro-Paper 60: *Language Coexistence*



Raúl Alberto Mora

Associate Professor, Education and Pedagogy Graduate Programs,
Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Sede Central Medellín | LSLP Chair
raul.mora@upb.edu.co

Defining the Term

The idea of language coexistence draws inspiration from two main sources: On the one hand, it finds inspiration in ideas from ecosystems theory and [language ecology](#) and the belief that language find balance within a linguistic ecosystem over time. On the other hand, it also finds inspiration in discussions about language globalization and nativization processes, as explained in [World Englishes](#). Here, the main assumption is that the exchanges across languages changes them, but not necessarily eradicate one at the expense of the others.

In this sense, language coexistence describes the ways the different languages in contact in a local setting (e.g. the city) find their own spaces as communicative resources, both independently and remixed. Language coexistence recognizes that language users in those spaces see all existing languages as communicative elements they can use for their own purposes, even if, as [polylinguaging](#) has argued, language [competence](#) is emerging.

Language coexistence also appears as a counter-narrative to traditional ideas about *linguistic interference*, which always look at language contact from a deficit perspective and through a compartmentalized view of bi/plurilingualism. Language coexistence, on the other hand, recognizes that language users around the world develop very diverse repertoires in their languaging practices, that languages in our cities are in constant evolution, and that language interplay goes beyond traditional measures of what languages must look like.

Connecting it to LSLP

Language coexistence was one of the first findings in our earlier research on urban literacies. As we explored the city, we realized that English and other second languages were not relegating Spanish from its primary communicative roles in the city. Other languages were emerging next to each other, in conjunction with each other, and for multiple communicative purposes. Language coexistence,

therefore, has remained a constant search in our work. As we have moved from the individual to the social uses of second languages in Medellín, more examples of language coexistence keep surfacing. We have discovered these moments in our local graffiti, fashion choices, and tattoo narratives. We are now expanding our searches to the local uses of multiple languages and their evolution across individuals and communities.

Expanding Second Language Research

The idea of language coexistence has a bright future in second language studies. TESOL and Applied Linguistics have expanded their scope to survey language interactions, as evidenced in concepts such as linguistic landscaping or translanguaging. Concepts such as these aim to explore the richness of language interactions across spaces and individuals.

Describing said richness entails moving past deficit and prescriptive views of language use. Instead, they provide an invitation to embrace the fact that users themselves and the places they inhabit will set new rules for how languages will operate as part of their everyday communication. This renewed vision of languaging offers, therefore, a promising future for discussions of language coexistence in the studies that will emerge in years to com.

References

- Mora, R. A., Pulgarín, C., Ramírez, N., & Mejía-Vélez, M. C. (2018). English literacies in Medellín: The city as literacy. In S. Nichols and S. Dobson (Eds.), *Learning Cities: Multimodal explorations and placed pedagogies* (pp. 37-60). Singapore: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-981-10-8100-2_4
- Mufwene, S. (2006, January). Language endangerment: An embarrassment for linguistics. In *Proceedings from the Annual Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society* (Vol. 42, No. 2, pp. 111-140). Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Mufwene, S., & Vigouroux, C. B. (2008). Colonization, globalization and language vitality in Africa: An introduction. *Globalization and language vitality: Perspectives from Africa*, 1-31.