The status of the English language in the world and, more specifically in classrooms internationally, has been the focus of several recent articles and books. In a volume edited by Sifakis and Tsantila (2019), contributors from countries where English is not the first language, such as Germany, Greece, Portugal and Turkey, as well as writers from English language countries, reported on the place of English in their classrooms. Marr and English (2019) also investigated questions relating to TESOL teachers and the language they use with their students, building partly on their own experiences. Most recently, in this journal, Tamin (2021) discussed differences between policies and practices in Pakistan. Perhaps these sources came out too late to be referenced by the present editors, since none of them are listed here.

This most recent book also draws on contributors’ experiences in many countries. It has 11 chapters plus a foreword, introduction, epilogue and conclusion. One of the collection’s refreshing aspects is its inclusion of teachers’ voices from countries whose voices we hear less often. (I use the words “less often” to be safe, but in my case the truer word would be “never”.) First, a couple of definitions. The term EMI is used for contexts where English is used exclusively as a medium of instruction. When it comes to the title’s term of ‘translanguaging’ the writer of the foreword speaks of “the multiple ways in which it is understood” (p. xvi). More than one article in the book mentions that the word was originally coined in Welsh in the 1980s to describe what happened in Welsh-English bilingual classrooms. The varied descriptions from chapter to chapter confirm the difficulty of coming up with one, simple definition for this word which, very briefly, involves the use of multiple languages.

Since the book is not divided into sections nor arranged in any special chronology, the reader can feel free to pick chapters in any order. In my case, curiosity had me starting with countries I knew least about. In the Maldives, a Muslim country, children are exposed to Arabic and English as well as their local language. The widely published writer, Naashia Mohamed, starts by outlining how and why English came to have status in the Maldives to the point where it is now the medium of instruction for all subjects except the other two language classes.
the careful details about this case study of four friends aged between six and eleven telling stories, readers wanting to replicate it in their own country have a strong starting point.

For a study of a different age group and country there is the chapter on Khazakhstani students at an English-medium university, One of the three authors, Sulusash Kerimkulova, speaks from her starting point of more than 40 years’ experience of teaching and research in that country. The chapter opens with some more definitions of translanguaging, which the three authors describe as “both an approach to teaching and learning, and the application of that learning” (p. 141). The ’trans’ part of the term must have special meaning in a country which, apart from Khazak and Russian, has 130 ethnic groups. One interesting feature of this study is that it reports students’ own views about which languages they chose to study and why.

Next, I turned to places that were familiar to me, starting with a Cambodian study, the country where I once taught at a university in the early 70s. At the unnamed Phnom Penh university in this 2009 study, bilingual students and staff in the M.Ed programme were surveyed for their translanguaging attitudes, practices and views. A sense of that country’s international contacts came in the list of countries from which the staff involved in the study had gained their PhDs: four from Japan and one each from the United States and Germany.

The other seven studies are from South Africa (2), Kenya, Malawi, Hong Kong, Italy and Japan. The classes investigated in the book include primary, secondary and tertiary levels, the last being in the majority. They vary in their methods and, not surprisingly, in their results.

It would be interesting to hear how many of the groups mentioned in the book are amongst its readers. Will it be the policy makers whose decisions determine which languages are used in their country’s education systems? Probably not, because such choices are usually made for political rather than educational reasons. Will it be researchers? Probably, because the wide-ranging topics and methods give them a good starting point. Hopefully, classroom teachers will also get hold of the book so they can try out some of the many interesting tasks described here. Also, if they happen to have students from any of the countries mentioned, then the contents will help them understand those people’s backgrounds. The book is recommended to all these groups.

References

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