

Making plurilingualism accessible:
teaching plurilingual literature(s) in the
language classroom.







foreign language
Fremdsprache
une langue étrangère
främmande språk
lingua aliena

Two distinct perspectives

1. “native speaker“ of (only) German
2. plurilingual student

Two distinct **aims**?

1. “native speaker“ of (only) German
2. plurilingual student

Aims

For students who are “native speakers“ of (only) German

- realize that the German L1-nation state relationship is the exception in a global perspective
- acknowledge the existence and necessity for plurilingual communities in other countries and in Germany
- understand the complexity of plurilingual situations and experiences
- assess the advantages and chances of plurilingualism

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- **feel represented by classroom discussion**



How do we achieve that?

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Teaching Literature (choosing the “right“ books)

Book suggestions

Trevor Noah “Born A Crime“ (2016)

Michael Donkor “Hold“ (2018)

Ann Jaramillo “La Línea“ (2006)

Trevor Noah “Born A Crime“ (2016)



Language brings with it an identity and a culture, or at least the perception of it. A shared language says 'We're the same.' A language barrier says 'We're different.' The architects of apartheid understood this. Part of the effort to divide black people was to make sure we were separated not just physically but by language as well. In the Bantu¹⁰ schools¹¹, children were only taught in their home language. Zulu kids learned in Zulu. Tswana²⁰

kids learned in Tswana. Because of this, we'd fall into the trap the government had set for us and fight among ourselves, believing that we were different.

The great thing about language is that you can just as easily use it to do the opposite: convince people that they are the same. Racism teaches us that we are different because of the color of our skin. But because racism is stupid, it's easily tricked. If you're racist and you meet someone who doesn't look like you, the fact that he can't speak like you reinforces your racist pre-
conceptions¹: He's different, less intelligent. A brilliant scientist can come over the border from Mexico to live in America, but if he speaks in broken English, people say, 'Eh, I don't trust this guy.'

'But he's a scientist.'

'In Mexican science, maybe. I don't trust him.'

However, if the person who doesn't look like you speaks like you, your brain short-circuits² because your racism program has none of those instructions in the code. 'Wait, wait,' your mind says, 'the racism code says if he doesn't look like me he isn't like me, but the language code says if he speaks like me he ... is like me? Something is off here. I can't figure this out.'




It became a tool that served me my whole life. One day as a young man I was walking down the street, and a group of Zulu guys was walking behind me, closing in on me, and I could hear them talking to one another about how they were going to mug² me. *‘Asibambe le autie yomlungu. Phuma ngapha mina ngizoqhamuka ngemuva kwakhe.’* ‘Let’s get this white guy. You go to his left, and I’ll come up behind him.’ I didn’t know what to do. I couldn’t run, so I just spun around real quick and said, *‘Kodwa bafwethu yingani singavele sib-*

ambe umuntu inkunzi? Asenzeni. Mina ngikulindele.’ ‘Yo, guys, why don’t we just mug someone together? I’m ready. Let’s do it.’

They looked shocked for a moment, and then they started laughing. ‘Oh, sorry, dude¹. We thought you were something else. We weren’t trying to take anything from you. We were trying to steal from white people. Have a good day, man.’ They were ready to do me violent harm, until they felt we were part of the same tribe, and then we were cool. That, and so many other smaller incidents in my life, made me realize that language, even more than color, defines who you are to people.

I became a chameleon. My color didn’t change, but I could change your perception of my color. If you spoke to me in Zulu, I replied to you in Zulu. If you spoke to me in Tswana, I replied to you in Tswana. Maybe I didn’t look like you, but if I spoke like you, I was you.



Michael Donkor “Hold” [“Housegirl”] (2018)



'I think so.'

'I like the idea. Of changing, magically. Remind me of how you became different when you used to read to me. One minute you are like a monster, and then you are like you are a dog, and then like you are dead. And I nearly believed it all. Very entertaining. You were top marks at it, is true-oh.'

'*Me da ase.*'

'Maybe is right for you again, Belinda.'

'*Wo se sen?*'

'You can do anything now you are over in that different place. All different sorts of things from how you behaved here. But all you are doing is sweet pastry and getting all happy because she gives you name as for a puppy dog.'

Twi terms, phrases and expressions

Aane – Yes

Aba! – Exclamation of annoyance, disdain or disbelief

Aboa! – You beast!

Abrokyrie – Overseas

Abrokyriefoɔ – Foreigners

Abusuafoɔ – Extended family

Aden? – Why?

Adjei! – Exclamation of surprise or shock

Agoo? – May I come in?

Akwaaba – Welcome

Akwada bone! – Naughty child!

Ameɛ – Please enter

Ampa – It's true

Ewurade – God

Ɛfe paaa – Very nice

Fri ho! – Go away!

Gyae – Stop

Gye nyame – Traditional symbol meaning 'only God'

Hwe – Look

Hwe w'anim! – Look at your face!

Kwadwo besia – An 'effeminate' man

Maame – Miss/Mistress

Me ba – I am coming

Me boa? – I lie?

Me da ase – I thank you

Me nua – My sibling

Me pa wo kyew/me sroe – Please (I beg you)

Me yare – I am sick

Nananom – Elders

Oburoni – White person

Oburoni wawu – Second-hand clothes ('the white man is dead')

Paaa – Sign of emphasis

Sa? – Really?

Wa bo dam! – You are mad!

Wa te? – Do you hear?

Wa ye adeɛ – Well done

Wo se sen? – What did you say?

Wo wein? – Where are you?

Wo ye ... – You are ...

Won sere? – You won't laugh?

Yere – Wife

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“Keep your subtitley magic going“ (p. 87)

Ann Jaramillo “La Línea” (2006)



A piece of the silver chain caught in her hair. I untangled it, but a few strands of gray remained in the links. I left them. Abuelita gathered up the chain and the medallion, pressed it into my hand, and placed her hand on my head.

10 “*M’hijo, que La Virgen te guarde, te proteja y te cuide con todo su amor en tus caminos,*” she began. Her low, raspy voice was strong, but her hand trembled.

15 “*Y que La Virgen te abra los ojos hacia todos los que tienen menos que tú.*” This was an old blessing, but the words felt new. This time, the blessing was for me.

What have we seen?

- Literature is a useful vehicle for discussing plurilingualism.
- Suitable books are available from different contexts.
- Good literature enables students to adopt other perspectives.

Thank you for your attention!

