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ASSESSING MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS: GLOBAL FINDINGS INFORMING RESEARCH NEEDS IN ESTONIA

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Abstract. The article establishes the research needs regarding the assessment of multilingual learners (MLs) in Estonia in relation to the advances made in the field abroad, keeping in mind the changing Estonian schooling context (transition from Estonian/Russian-medium education to Estonian-only medium education, i.e. a situation where the students' schooling language is Estonian). The article identifies MLs as a heterogeneous group whose assets (e.g., multilingual access to information) as well as hurdles in the assessment process of studying via a foreign language/L2 (comprehension of instructions, managing time, responding to tasks, etc.) have increasingly been the focus of educational research abroad. With regard to the similarly heterogeneous Estonian MLs, virtually no research is available about the ML assessment participants and processes here. Research needs are then proposed with regard to Estonian ML's assets, teachers' ML assessment practices, ML behavior during assessment, ML assessment tools, and ML assessment frameworks.

Keywords: multilingual learner assessment, multiliteracy, learner assets, assessment hurdles, translanguaging, accommodation, assessment frameworks

Introduction

Multilingual learners (MLs) are defined in research literature as "students with the ability to navigate school in more than one language" (Nordmeyer 2023: 248). This definition has been proposed with a view of focusing on those students' potential strength to bring knowledge

and experience via an additional language into the learning process. Known as an 'assets-based approach' (cf. Gottlieb 2024), it rests on the belief that those students' difference in cultural backgrounds (including their home language proficiency) from that of their classmates' is an advantage rather than a drawback. The view is juxtaposed to the 'deficit-oriented stance,' (cf. Fitzpatrick et al. 2024, Gottlieb 2024), which focuses on the MLs' struggle with their studies if their schooling language is not their first language. Gottlieb (2024) asserts that "assessing multilingual learners only in one language when, in fact, these students are bi/multilingual is a fallacy" (51) and echoes the conclusion drawn in a multitude of contexts that evaluating MLs solely in just one language constitutes a pertinent social justice and educational equity issue, which consequently restricts both students and educators in terms of available options and undermines their opportunities for development (ibid,).

The current article reviews the current research regarding the peculiarities of ML assessment participants and the challenges that emerge in the assessment process. The focus then shifts to available information about ML assessment practices in Estonia. After establishing Estonian MLs as a heterogeneous group, suggestions are made about what issues need further research in Estonia to create more informed, equitable assessment conditions for Estonian MLs.

The research questions for the current article are as follows:

- What ML assets and respective assessment challenges does international research currently uncover?
- What kind of studies can facilitate more informed and equitable ML assessment decisions in Estonia?

Multilingual Learner Assets

Research overwhelmingly agrees that although MLs face challenges while studying through the medium of a foreign language, they also come with a set of assets. Marsh et al. (2020) maintain that MLs have an "advantage in relation to aspects of problem-solving, including abstract

thinking skills, creative hypothesis formulation, higher concept formation skills, and overall higher mental flexibility" (9). By having more than one language at one's disposal, MLs have a 'metalinguistic advantage' (ibid, 10) – an ability to juxtapose language/communication use in different languages. Gallagher and Scrivener (2024) and March et al. (2020) all refer to the additive outcome of multilingualism – the reciprocal enrichment of the languages known to the user/learner. Marsh et al. (2020) also highlight the MLs' superior "ability to retain, organize, store and retrieve information" (ibid, 11), testifying to a different kind of brain-functioning compared to monolinguals. What transpires then is that "having access to multiple languages offers MLs options to deepen and expand their language development and learning" (Gottlieb 2024: 50). Proceeding from these findings, MLs are in a good position to tackle higher order thinking skills with classroom tasks and in assessment situations. Thus, in addition to remembering facts, comprehending concepts, and applying the said knowledge, ML instruction and assessment tasks should call for a display of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Bloom et al. 1956) with systems of evaluating assessment results in place.

Having access to multiple languages leads learners to engage in translanguaging, a skill inaccessible to monolingual students. García (2009: 140) defines 'translanguaging' as "the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential." The term 'translanguaging' places the focus on the different kinds of communicative practices and linguistic repertoires of MLs in the process of making meaning. Karkar-Esperat (2025) finds that translanguaging happens "on different language levels [...] involving all language skills [...] where students compare different structures of texts in different languages [...] reflect on languages to increase their metalinguistic awareness [...] identify morphemes, [...] codeswitch" (121), etc. Lopez and Turkan (2025) show that during the completion of classroom tasks, MLs use a variety of resources to convey the meaning of particular objects and processes

on the one hand, and engaged in various translanguaging practices (using English, Spanish or their combination) as well as oral, written, or multimodal responses, on the other, to describe and explain the outcome. They maintain that traditional content assessments where the MLs are restricted to using just one language can misjudge their content understanding due to the limited proficiency of the assessment language. Shohamy (2006) points out that in addition to words, learners use many additional modalities – "visuals, graphics, fashion, images, music, hip-hop, dance, food, silence, etc." (15) – to convey meaning and refers to this feature as 'languaging' (ibid,). ML language is reported to frequently display multimodality (Fitzpatrick et al. 2024, Nordmeyer 2023) which suggests that the assessment tools designed for measuring ML' subject knowledge should allow for different modalities, too. Failure to include different modalities may be viewed as construct underrepresentation (Mahoney 2024: 57), a situation where the test content is not reflective of students'relevant knowledge or skills. This, in turn, represents a validity threat in assessment. Karkar-Esperat (2025) and Lopez and Turkan (2025) all underscore the importance of inclusive assessment practices that incorporate multimodal approaches and value students' diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These inclusive practices 'enhance teachers' comprehension and empower students to effectively communicate complex academic ideas and relationships, leading to increased engagement and improved learning outcomes […] enhancing teaching and assessment practices (Lopez and Turkan 2025:21). Fine recommends that teachers engage in a 'translanguaging pedagogies framework' (2022: 194–195) consisting of three components: a translanguaging stance (a system of respective beliefs), a translanguaging design (tasks and assessment which purposefully involve translanguaging), and translanguaging shifts (small instructional adjustments deriving from the classroom situation at hand). She maintains that "incorporating translanguaging into pedagogical and assessment designs enables students to express their ideas through their entire linguistic repertoire and enables teachers to see

students' understandings in a more nuanced and complete manner" (208). Nordmeyer (2023: 17) corroborates this claim, demonstrating that translanguaging in assessments can improve engagement, confidence, and the accurate reflection of students' knowledge, even if their English skills are still developing.

Multilingual Learner Assessment Hurdles

The overall goal of assessing MLs is affording them terms that are fair and equal all other learners in the given context of demonstrating their knowledge and skills during both formative and summative assessment practices. The section reviews various sources of inequality in the assessment process for MLs.

'Schooling language', also termed 'academic language', is something that MLs constantly contend with. Although MLs represent a wealth of linguistic and cultural backgrounds – for example, in Estonian classrooms, 60 different languages are represented (Haridussilm) – their academic achievement needs to be demonstrated in a language that is not their first language but the use of which they nevertheless need to accept (Souto-Manning 2021). Academic language deficit – i.e. lack of appropriate lexical, grammatical, and discourse knowledge and skills to function adequately within a particular subject context – has been shown to account for lower test scores of multilingual students compared to their non-multilingual peers (Karkar-Esperat 2025: 118) with the difference increasing at higher school levels. Because MLs come with a multitude of literacy levels in their languages, their response to classroom assessment practices varies widely. Research findings here point to limitations of traditional assessment methods. Lenski et al. (2006) state that "all assessments in English are also assessments of English" which means that the schooling language proficiency of the student will affect the test score of the test taker. There is a significant language demand inherent in most assessments, especially in content areas. Curricular subjects, e.g., physics, chemistry, history, geography, are

linguistically and conceptually complex, with technical and culturally embedded vocabulary, as well as complicated grammatical structures and discourse patterns. Inadequate receptive skills in the assessment language may prevent the student from understanding the requirements of the task and result in poor task completion. On the other hand, the student may grasp what is expected of them but, because of inadequate productive skills, still fail to demonstrate their control of the subject adequately. Thus, for example, checking student subject knowledge with the help of large-scale multiple-choice tests, monolingual matching tasks, and essay questions could potentially pose validity concerns for MLs, as the completion of such tasks is solely dependent on language proficiency and can thus produce an inaccurate picture of MLs' command of the subject.

We can also look at this as deficient ways of measuring knowledge that does not allow students to display their knowledge accurately, i.e. an assessment tool that is not performing the way it should. Assessment practices should be tied to instructional practices. As it is, there can be a discrepancy between instruction and assessment language – the language used by teachers in the classroom and the language used in assessment tasks. Assessments might use more complex or less frequent linguistic structures than the students have encountered during instruction, impacting performance (Fine 2024, Mahoney 2024). Also, if the assessment tasks are not scaffolded similarly to instructional tasks, students may consider the assessment to be unfair, as they feel deprived of the tools they became used to during instruction (Butler and Stevens 1997). Since scaffolding during instruction means explicit academic vocabulary instruction, visual aids, graphic organizers, modified materials, and multiple modalities of presentation, aspects of it should feature in assessment processes as well. Another consideration is MLs' familiarity with task completion strategies. Unless properly instructed and familiarized with effective strategies to manage particular assessment task types, students are left to their own devices. Fitzpatrick et al. (2024:25) show that MLs often use flawed logic and test-taking strategies, or recall isolated words to answer questions,

masking their actual understanding of the content, also pointing to the need for carefully designed assessment tools that pre-empt such strategies. Mahoney (2024) discusses the problem in terms of 'construct irrelevant variance', presence of extraneous, uncontrolled variables that affect assessment outcomes, and sees it as "a major validity threat for test scores of MLs" (55). The assessment task development, thus, is of particular importance to ensure that MLs can demonstrate their subject knowledge and skills in spite of their less than perfect language control.

Teacher beliefs about learners, including MLs, affect their pedagogical choices of managing teaching in the classroom and assessing ML student performance. Gallagher and Scrivener (2024), having reviewed numerous articles on teacher beliefs about MLs, found that teachers frequently voiced dominant language beliefs, i.e., the need to foster the use and development of the schooling language, whereas the heritage language was seen as additional or secondary. They "assumed no responsibility for supporting the students' multilingualism or H[eritage]L[anguage] maintenance" (834). The study also found that the teachers in the studies generally believed that MLs lacked in subject knowledge. They tended to focus on what the ML students did not have – specifically language ability and literacy – and overlooked their assets, e.g., the knowledge of their home language (ibid,). Given said beliefs, change may be called for in in-service teacher education with a focus on what is known about a multilingual mind. Mahoney (2024) sums up the discussion by showing that MLs are simultaneously seen on a continuum of promise and deficit, i.e., "what the student knows and can do relative to multiple measures and [...] what the student does not know relative to one measure" (71). The two views are present together in school systems with state systems generally representing the deficit view, i.e., what the learners are lacking and the classroom assessment practices attempting to represent the view of promise (8). The challenge for the educators is if they "can look at MLs through a lens of promise within an accountability system focused on what children cannot do" (73).

Frameworks for Multilingual Learner Assessment and Best Practices

Research related to the assessment of ML student performance (Gottlieb 2024, Karkar-Esperat 2025, Marsh et al. 2020, Mahoney 2024) has proposed visions for the 21st century education system and how assessment should feature in those visions. Researchers envisage a substantial change in what is included in the curriculum on the one hand, and how the curriculum content is managed, i.e., how knowledge and skills are taught and learned including how that learning is documented and assessed.

Marsh et al. (2020:4) see 21st century education as enhancing systems thinking (the ability to detect patterns and interdependency of phenomena) to develop global competences (cf. Castaneda Valle 2024, OECD 2025) combining crystallized intelligence (drawing conclusions from prior knowledge) and fluid intelligence (processing information in novel, creative, and innovative ways). In language education, they profess an approach which is very much in line with the Common European Framework of Reference's Companion Volume (CEFR CV); it is an action-oriented approach that sees the language user/learner as a social agent, autonomously engaging in real-life tasks constructed around purposefully selected notions and functions derived from their needs (2020: 22). Marsh et al. (2020) maintain that "successful language learning requires a blend of language learning and language acquisition through high-impact dialogic teaching and learning activities which are meaningful, relevant, and engaging." (14). As the 21st century school's goal is to develop creative and innovative students relying on systems thinking using all languages available to them, assessment of knowledge should move "from standardized tests which measure crystallised intelligence" (15) to tests measuring "both crystallised and fluid intelligence" (ibid,).

Gottlieb (2024) highlights the need to build the assessment approach on identifying the most pertinent modern linguistic, psychological, and multilingual language learning theories. Of the latter, funds

of knowledge, multiliteracies, translanguaging, and linguistic and cultural sustainability are deemed to yield approaches most useful for fair and valid assessment practices. Gottlieb recommends that a three-step approach be adopted for MLs: first, teachers make language choices available to students (i.e., inform them which language(s) they can use during assessment); next, together with students, teachers co-design a classroom language and assessment policy; finally, teachers rely on multiple sources of data in their student evaluation practice (52). This way, all assessment instances can be approached in an informed and consistent manner.

Mahoney (2024) proposes the PUMI (purpose, use, method, instrument) framework as "a decision-making process to help stake-holders make better decisions about assessment for MLs" (7). According to the PUMI framework, developing a good assessment tool starts with four key decisions: the purpose of the given assessment (i.e., why the assessment is necessary), the use of assessment results (e.g., what important inferences will be made based on the assessment results), the best assessment method (i.e., how the data will be collected), and the best assessment instrument (i.e. the concrete measurement tool to be used for the said purpose) (22). The intentional, outcome-centered nature of the PUMI framework means that assessments will more accurately gauge student understanding.

Karkar-Esperat et al. (2025) recommend a complex educational approach aiming to support teachers in the contemporary multilingual classroom. Their MultiSemiotic Architecture Framework combines semiotics (multiliteracies, new literacies, and transmultiliteracies), translanguaging, and critical literacy (119), incorporating linguistic, gestural, visual, audio, spatial and synesthesic modes to "enable students to connect deeply with lessons through their identities, thereby enhancing engagement and fostering meaningful learning experiences" (129). Both Mahoney's and Karkar-Esperat's approaches emphasize the need to engage the learner and bring each student's individual experience to the classroom as well as support

the teacher's task to offer meaningful tasks that allow students to use their multilingual repertoire. Simultaneously, Karkar-Esperat champion the need for designing respective assessment tools appropriate to ML classrooms.

Research agrees (Donley 2024, Fine, Braaten 2024, Gottlieb 2024, Lenski et al. 2006, Marsh et al. 2020, Schissel et al. 2018, Shute 2011, etc.) that the best assessment practices are those that combine learning theories and multimodal task-based language assessment instruments. The reason is best summed up by Lenski et al. (2006): "Performance assessment tasks allow teachers to simultaneously instruct and assess. When students undertake the process of completing an authentic performance assessment, the students plan, self-monitor, and evaluate progress continually, while creating a product. Throughout this process, the teacher is able to engage in ongoing informal assessment of the student's progress." (32). Classroom assessments completed under best practices are where: the goal (both in terms of subject and language) has been defined and shared with students; the students are involved in the co-development of classroom tasks as well as success criteria; the students, while solving tasks that allow multimodality, can make recourse to their multiple languages; the students may engage in self- and peer evaluation; and the students feel that they have been given a fair opportunity (cf. Gottlieb 2024: 58). Lenski et al. (2006) underscores the need for authenticity during the process of assessment and recommends using a variety of tools to achieve that, e.g. "anecdotal records, checklists, rating scales, portfolios [... i.e.] a multidimensional approach including alternative assessments" (28). Multiple types of assessments within one classroom allow for a more equitable and accurate view of student progress.

To reduce the level of unfairness for MLs during assessment due to limited proficiency of the assessment language, using ML accommodations are suggested as a strategy. Butler and Stevens (1997) define accommodations as "support provided to students for a given testing event, either through modification of the test itself or through modifications of the testing procedure, to help students access the content in

the classroom language and better demonstrate what they know" (5). Abedi et al. (2004) list a number of possible accommodation options: affording extra time, employing bilingual tests, adjusting wording allowing the use of monolingual or bilingual dictionaries, providing a glossary of terms, and oral test administration. De Backer et al. (2019) highlight the students' perspective of ML assessment maintaining that pupils generally see the benefits of providing accommodations to MLs who are not yet proficient in the language of schooling: "increasing understanding, contributing to learning, getting better marks on tests and providing teachers with a better picture of the pupils that are being assessed. Pupils report that the accommodation can help their multilingual classmates who are in the process of learning the language of schooling to gain more understanding of the test question and thus help them learn language and content while improving their test results" (839–840). In addition to that, accommodations were reported to account for increased inclusion and participation of MLs in the classroom activities (837), contributing to equity. Without accommodations, MLs tended to be excluded in many activities due to language barriers.

There is, however, a caveat to providing accommodations to MLs. Considering that MLs are not a homogeneous group (cf. Butler, Stevens, 2001; Fine, Furtak, 2020, Fitzpatrick et al. 2024), it is important to decide in every assessment context which MLs need accommodations and which do not. De Backer et al. (2019) and Li and Suen (2012) warn that "the accommodation should not render an additional advantage for the pupil receiving it. If it does, that would mean the assessment was unfair for the pupils without the accommodation" (De Backer et al. 2019: 835). If the accommodation is available to all MLs in the given assessment context, it should be planned so that it has no impact on the fairness and equality of test conditions (Li and Suen 2012). Differentiating between which students should and should not receive accommodation needs careful consideration, as even if the student does not actually need accommodation, not getting it while a classmate does may be perceived as unfair.

Estonian Multilingual Learners as a Heterogeneous Group

While viewing the Estonian educational landscape with the aim of disclosing a taxonomy of ML here, Nordmeyer's (2023) definition of ML is useful: "students with the ability to navigate school in more than one language" (248). The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research relies on the Estonian Language Act to maintain that "a foreign language is any language other than the native language of the speaker"; any language other than Estonian and Estonian sign language is considered foreign (Language Act). In the Estonian context of schooling, a distinction is made between a second language and a foreign language. Estonian is generally referred to as a non-native learner's second language (L2), a language learned in the learner's environment where it is the language of governance, education, business, etc. All other languages (including Russian and English – most widely used other languages in Estonia (Statistikaamet)) are referred to as foreign languages. Although legally considered foreign languages, Russian and English are home languages for 382,155 and 2,462 people respectively, overall 2.8% of the population (Statistikaamet). Census results (2021) show that 243 different mother tongues are spoken in Estonia; 76% of Estonia's population speak a foreign language and 17% of the population speak Estonian as L2 (Statistikaamet). Further, 48% of the population claim to be able to use one other language, 35% use two, 13% use three and 3% maintain that they can use four other languages (Statistikaamet). The respective data for school-age children are limited to stating that Estonian-medium schools feature 60 different home-language backgrounds (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium), which implies that students coming from them may, in principle, be able to access information in multiple languages, thus making them MLs.

Estonia is, thus, inherently a multilingual community, and often, students do not have their home language as their schooling language or have additional languages available to them besides the schooling language. Different groups can be identified here. First, students (or their parents) may select a foreign language as their schooling language for

a variety of reasons (prestige, proximity, lack of other options, etc.). According to the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, there are currently 1,337 (0.8%) students here who are studying through the medium of either English, French, or Finnish (Haridussilm). Additionally, students here may find themselves studying via a non-home language as a result of the on-going educational reform. This is happening to about 15,710 students (9.6% of the whole student body) who, as of December 2022, are gradually moving from predominantly Russian-medium schooling to Estonian-medium education to be completed it by 2030 (Haridussilm). The third group of students who are studying through the medium of a second language are the 831 (2024) new immigrant learners (mostly from Ukraine) (Haridussilm) who are required by law to attend school in their new resident country and, in the majority of instances, are studying through the medium of Estonian or Russian.[1] The multilingual students in Estonian classrooms are thus a heterogeneous group in terms of why they are being educated in a foreign language: the status is established by the combination of choice, the country's educational policy, and world politics. Any learner whose schooling language is not their first language may thus potentially represent either of two somewhat different groups of learners: the students facing the government-initiated transition to Estonian-medium education, on the one hand, or students who have elected to complete the whole or part of their education in a second or foreign language (English, German, French).

Another category of students may be added to the equation here – the students whose schooling language is their first language, but who are proficient enough in a foreign language to access subject content in that language. For example, during the 2023/2024 academic year, of the 4,758 students who attempted the Cambridge Advanced exam here, 933 reached C2, 3135 reached C1, 666 reached B2, and only 24 did not

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[1] It should be noted, however, that in many instances, Ukranian immigrant students have Russian as their first language and entering a Russian-medium school in Estonia would be studying in their home language.

make the level that was tested (Inglise keele riigieksami ja rahvus-vaheliste inglise keele eksamite aruanne 2024). Having the proficiency level of B2 and higher implies that the students are able to and use the foreign language for a multitude of purposes (CEFR CV), making them multilingual language users. Similar trends can be detected on the basic school level. All basic school (Form 9, equivalent to secondary school) graduates in Estonia should be independent language users of at least two foreign languages (Põhikooli riiklik õppekava). In 2024, 52% of test takers reached B1 in Estonian as a second language, and the median result of B1 level proficiency in English as a foreign language (an elective exam) was 94% (Põhikooli lõpueksamite aruanded 2024). Although the exam results may not always truly represent the students' actual language ability (cf. Klaas-Lang, et al. 2025), there is a potential of engaging such students in studying subject content in a foreign language here.

The above data illustrate the results of English as a foreign language and are quoted here purposefully to draw the researchers' attention to the position of the English language in Estonian society. While officially a foreign language, its role has rapidly increased to seemingly that of an L2, as it is the exclusive working language of many businesses, banking, some higher education establishment programmes, etc. English is widely available and used in the media and social media for interaction. School and university age young people can be observed to interact in English with each other although both speakers share a common first language which is not English. There is emerging research to suggest that, on occasion, children as young as kindergarten age prefer to speak about particular topics in English rather than their first language (Estonian) (personal communication with kindergarten-age children's parents). These learners should be viewed apart from the learners whose schooling language and home language is English and who do not have any other language available to them and do not thus qualify as MLs. Further research is needed to establish the precise role and scope of use of the English language in Estonia.

Implications for Research

The assessment of students in the Estonian school system so far has been conducted using the language of instruction in the given school, assuming that the students in the respective Estonian – or Russian – medium school constitute a fairly homogeneous student body. Level tests and school-leaving examinations were developed in parallel Estonian and Russian versions, ignoring the ML aspect. In the rapidly emerging Estonian-only schooling situation, with a growing awareness of the student body characteristics and requirements set for the 21st century education, taking into account the advances made world-wide in ML assessment research, more information about MLs here is needed to design assessment practices that would allow such student to show their full potential. This period of transition is a good opportunity to integrate ML assessment practices in the classroom with accompanying research. While some research on multilingual learning in Estonia has been done on teacher beliefs (Rüütmaa et al. 2023) and parental attitudes (Klaas-Lang et al. 2023), as well as on the nature and effect of translanguaging (Bernhard 2024), research pertaining to ML assessment is virtually missing in Estonia.

Studies are called for in the following areas of ML assessment outlined below.

Asset Awareness. ML assets reflected in assessment practices on all levels (classroom, school, high-stakes national exams). From the point of view of assessment task development as well as classroom practices, how aware MLs are of their assets and to what extent they rely on them. Differences between MLs and non-MLs in terms of assessment task performance and performance outcome.

ML accommodations. If more is known about teachers' behavior during ML assessment, e.g., types and degrees of accommodation provided for such learners; attitudes to such accommodations; teacher translanguaging practices, etc., more focused assessment literacy in-service training could be designed which would hopefully lead to fairer assessment practices.

Assessment re-assessment. Evaluation of the current high-stakes examinations with regard to task types, task content, task-accessibility (complexity of instructions), level of task scaffolding (provision of support) and ways of providing a task solution (content/language relationship). Such investigation should lead to fairer assessment conditions on all levels.

MLs during assessment. This includes MLs' attitudes towards and their behavior during assessment, degree of accessing other languages for comprehension and task completion and ways of helping them to leverage this strength, student translanguaging practices. The aim of such research would be to identify the different hurdles that hinder MLs' best performance during assessment.

Effectiveness of internationally proposed alternative frameworks (e.g. PUMI, MultiSemiotic Architecture framework, etc.) for ML assessment. A critical analysis of such frameworks in the Estonian context could facilitate their appropriate adoption here.

Much like the trend among MLs worldwide (cf. Butler, Stevens 2001; Fine, Furtak 2020, Fitzpatrick et al. 2024), Estonian MLs are not a homogeneous group. Educators here should be challenged to disclose the assets that those students bring to the classroom and examine the hurdles that MLs need to clear in order to succeed. In order to design best ML assessment practices, research is needed to discover the characteristics of the ML assessment process participants (teachers, students) and processes here.

Conclusion

Research worldwide identifies MLs as having a number of assets in the learning process – a metalinguistic advantage of being able to compare and contrast languages, brain-functioning conducive to engaging in higher-order thinking, translanguaging, etc. – that need to be reflected in instructional as well as assessment decisions.

Assessment of MLs is challenging for a number of reasons. The MLs' language proficiency may prevent them from understanding

the requirements of the task or their production skills may not allow them to demonstrate what they know or can do. The student may be unfamiliar with the assessment task type. The assessment validity may be at stake due to construct irrelevant variance in the measurement tool: it may be deficient in terms of either not representing the language variety (level of difficulty) used during instruction, relying too heavily on manipulating large amounts of text, or employing a limited number of task types, which favors particular learners. Assessment may be affected by the beliefs of such teachers who are uninformed of or refuse to acknowledge their role as a facilitator of multilingual learning.

Due to ML idiosyncrasies, research today recommends either abandoning traditional assessment instruments or using them in conjunction with a multitude of different assessment tools. The approach recommended in various studies is to rely on the relevant linguistic, psychological, and multilingual language learning theories to develop multimodal task-based language assessment instruments. To do that, various frameworks can be adopted to standardize the assessment procedure (e.g. PUMI, MultiSemiotic Architecture Framework). Given what we know about MLs today, research overwhelmingly advocates for assessment policies and practices on all levels that acknowledge and support the multilingualism of learners, building on and improving restrictive one-language-only policies.

Relying on the advances made in the research of ML assessment abroad and viewing Estonian MLs as a heterogeneous group coming from varied sets of backgrounds but sharing an ability to access information in different languages, research is needed about Estonian ML's assets, teachers' ML assessment practices, ML behavior during assessment, ML assessment tools, and ML assessment frameworks for more informed educational decisions.