Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies (MEITS)

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The MEITS team

- 4 UK HEs
  - **Cambridge, Queen's Belfast, Edinburgh, Nottingham**

- 34 researchers + 1 project manager
  - **PI: Wendy Ayres-Bennett**
  - **11 Co-Is, 14 PDRAs, 6 PhD students**

- International HE partners
  - **Peking University**
  - **The Chinese University of Hong Kong**
  - **University of Bergen**
  - **University of Girona**

Non-university partners

- Language associations
  - e.g. **Routes into Languages, Speak to the Future, ALL, Association of Language Testers in Europe, NI Department for Communities**
- Schools, local authorities and language teaching/assessment bodies
  - **e.g. Cambridge Assessment, Jack Hunt School Peterborough, Cambridge County Council**
- National bodies / charitable foundations
  - e.g. **Age UK, U3A, Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists, British Chambers of Commerce, Bell Foundation, Co-operation Ireland**
- International bodies
  - **e.g. UNESCO, European Federation of National Institutions for Language**
- Grassroots organisations
  - **e.g. Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum, Co-Operation Ireland, Cambridge bilingual groups**
- Arts
  - **e.g. Nottingham Writers' Studio, Cambridgeshire Film Consortium**
- Commercial partners
  - **HarperCollins, Upper Street Events**

Objectives

- Create new knowledge about the **opportunities and challenges** of multilingualism for individuals, communities and nations

- **Change attitudes** towards multilingualism in the general public and among key stakeholders and policymakers (e.g. the relationships between multilingualism and society, multilingualism and identity)

- Develop **new interdisciplinary research paradigms** and methodologies

- Demonstrate how an innovative interdisciplinary project can integrate language-led research with literary-cultural studies, thereby address **key issues of our times**

Research questions

What are

- o **the opportunities & challenges of multilingualism?**

What is the relationship between

- o **the mono-/multi-lingual individual & the mono-/multi-lingual society?**
- o **multilingualism, diversity and identity?**
- o **multilingualism and language learning?**

How can we

- o **influence attitudes towards multilingualism?**
- o **re-energise Modern Languages research?**

Which languages?

Major European and world languages:

- ○ **traditionally studied : French, German, Spanish**

- ○ **newly introduced into UK education: Mandarin Chinese**

Minoritised languages:

- ○ **in the UK: Scottish Gaelic, Irish, Welsh**
- ○ **in mainland Europe: Catalan, Ukrainian**

Community languages:

- ○ **in the UK: Bengali, Polish, Cantonese**
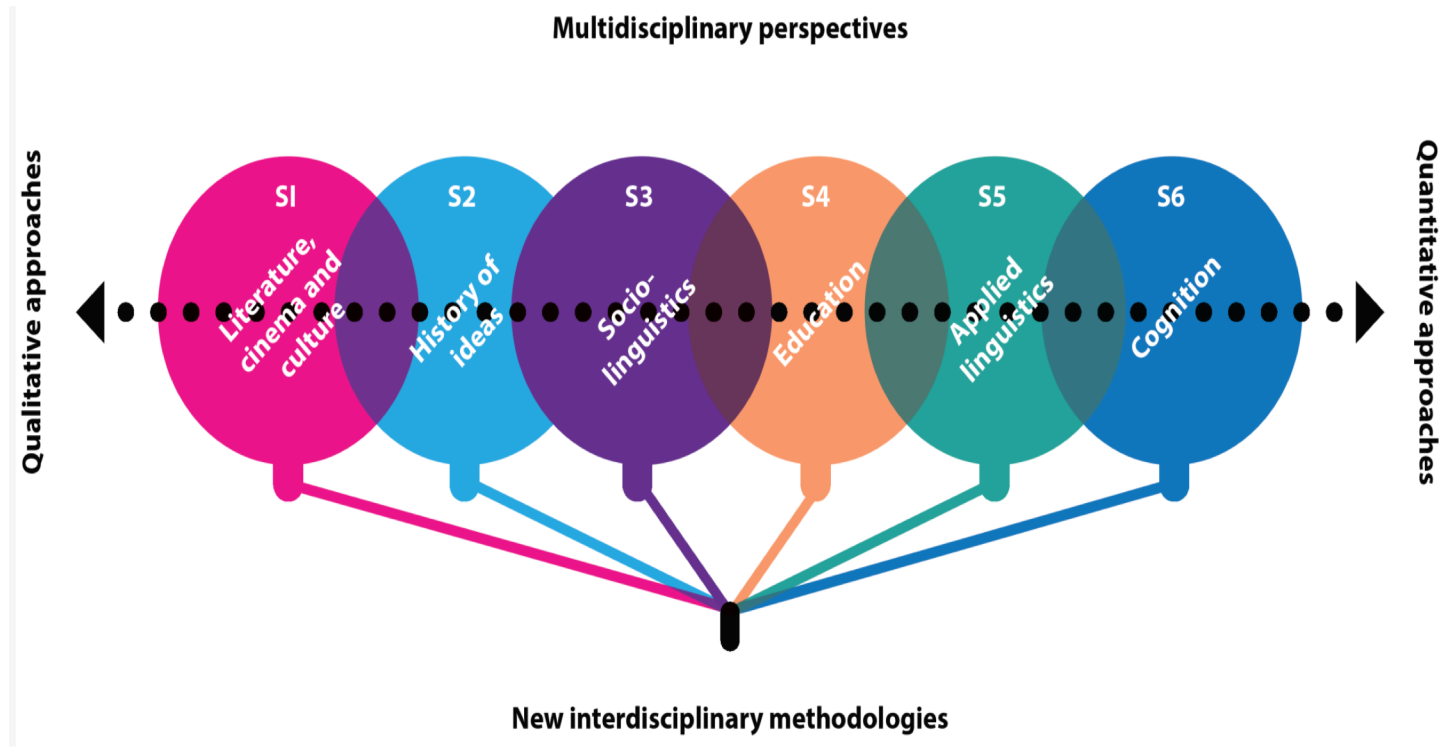- ○ **adding case studies as appropriate: Arabic, Urdu**

Disciplines

Our six research strands
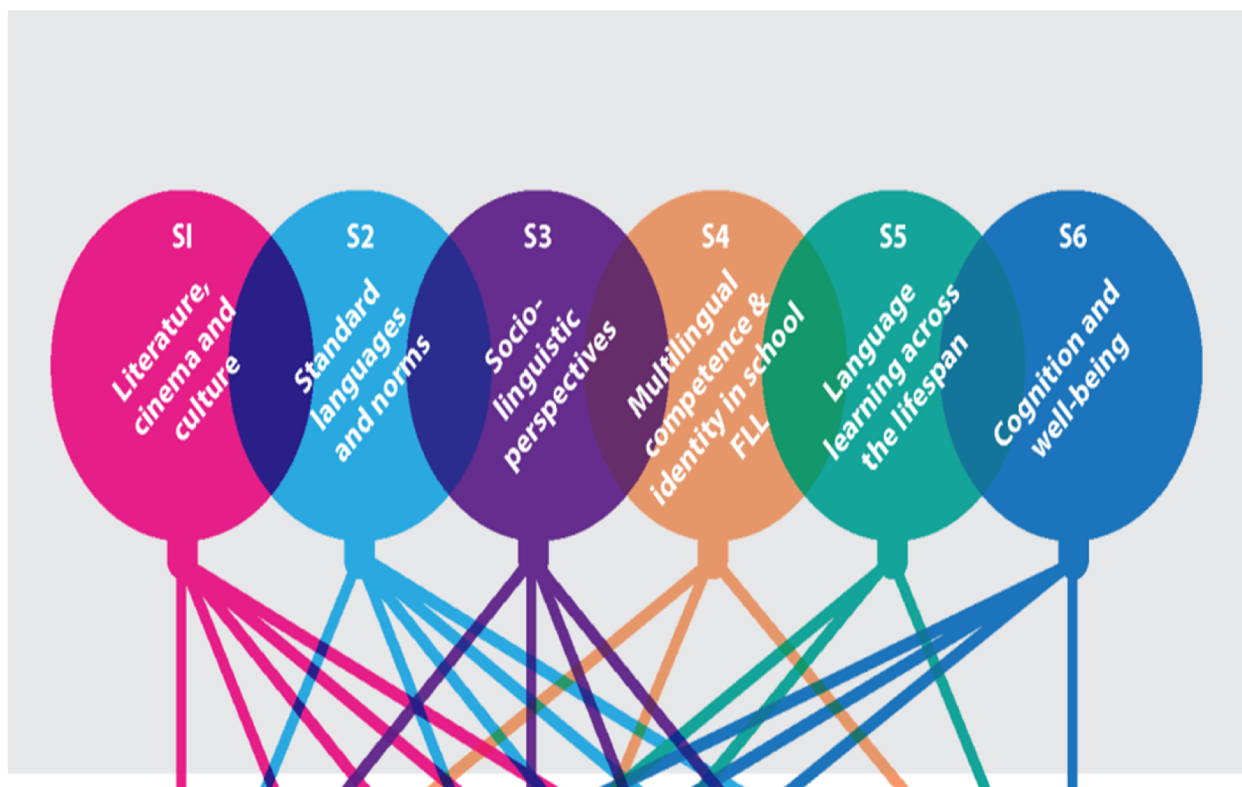
Strand 1 Arts of identity: literature, cinema, culture and citizenship in a globalizing Europe

- Focussing on the 19th to the 21st century, and on Ukrainian and Catalan, the research questions are:

• How do cultural events and works of literature, film and theatre contribute to understandings and misunderstandings about the place and function of languages in culture?

• How does linguistic diversity bear on regional and national identities and communities affected by colonial pasts, particularly in the realm of culture?

• How does multilingualism figure in conflict and conflict resolution both intra-and internationally, especially with reference to today's Ukraine?

Strand 2 Standard languages, norms and variation: comparative perspectives in multilingual contexts

Working on Chinese, French and German, the research questions are:

- Why are beliefs in standard languages, rules and correctness so pervasive?

- What is a standard language, especially in multilingual contexts?

- How important are standard languages to minoritized languages?

- What role do standard languages and non-standard varieties play in language education?

Strand 5 Sociolinguistic perspectives on multilingualism: identity, diversity and social cohesion

With a particular focus on France (French and Breton) and Ireland (Irish), the research questions are:

- How does the concept of national identity, especially where it is fluid or contested, intersect with multilingualism?

- Does multilingualism protect distinctive cultural identities or erode them? What does it mean for the agency of individual citizens in their daily use of language and what are the implications for government policy?

- Does multilingualism help or hinder the maintenance of minoritised languages? What are the tensions between standardisation and native-speaker usage and/or regional identity markers?

- What is the relationship between multilingualism, social cohesion and/or conflict resolution, and societal well-being? What are the policy implications with regard to education and the public space?

Strand 5 Language learning across the lifespan: the role of age, etc.

Strand 5 has two legs: one looking at the acquisition of French, Chinese and Polish in the UK, the other looking at English- and Cantonese-speaking learners of Mandarin Chinese (UK, Hong Kong and mainland China). The research questions are:

- To what extend does the age of onset affect the path and successful acquisition of a second language?

- What role does learning experience (i.e., taught, non-taught, bilingual, heritage, perceived status of language) play in acquisition of various domains of language?

- What is the impact of language-specific factors (typology) on the first two issues?

Strand 6 Multilingualism and cognition: implications for motivation, health and well-being

This cognitive science strand investigates the influence of language learning/practice on cognitive functions in children with autism, in healthy ageing and in brain disease:

- What are the benefits and challenges of multilingualism for those with atypical cognitive profiles, such as autism and dementia?

- Can the results of recent research suggesting that bilingualism can counteract cognitive ageing and delay the onset of dementia – and that these effects extend to those who learned other languages in adulthood – provide a powerful motivation for learning new, and maintaining existing, languages?
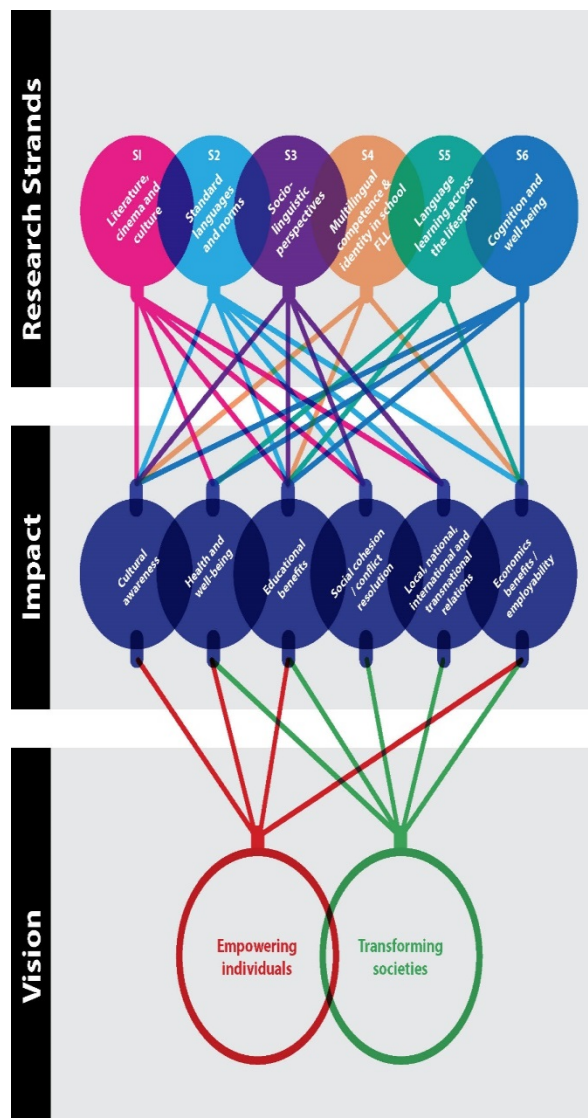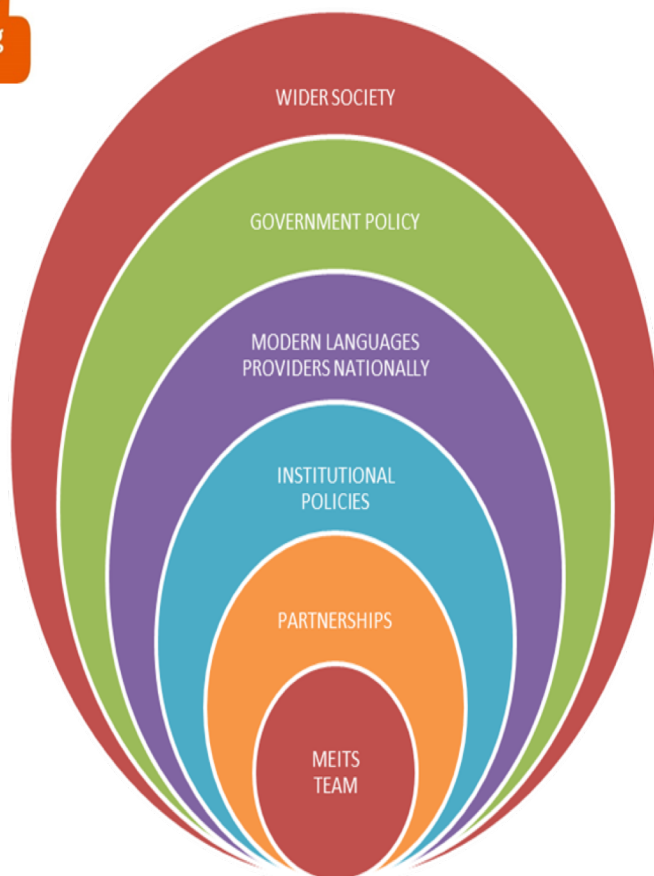
Strand 4: Education
'The influence of multilingual identity on foreign language learning'

- To investigate the link between multilingualism, and the extent to which one identifies as multilingual, and learning in school.

- To see how multilingual identity is developed through learning a language

- To devise innovative pedagogical approaches to help learners to identify themselves as multilingual, with a view to improving motivation and achievement in school and promoting greater engagement with language learning.

Research context

- 7 secondary schools in England
  - A range of schools from across the East of England and London
  - Range of geographical locations (urban/rural)
  - Range of school size and language provision
  - Range of demographics of students (first language background, socioeconomic status etc.)

- Participants
  - Year 8-9 (age 12-14) and Year 10-11 (age 14-16) students over a 2 year period.
  - Approximately 2000 students in total

Research design

- Longitudinal study, tracking the link between multilingual identity, learner motivation and academic achievement in school.
- Mixed methods : quantitative (surveys and achievement data) and qualitative (interviews, drawing, extended writing)
- Demographic data (EAL, first language, pupil premium etc.)
- Introspective data (learner beliefs, self-perceptions, motivations and attitudes).
- Achievement data (school assessment scores in a range of subjects, including languages, GCSE results).
- Quasi-experimental intervention in 4 of the project schools (8 intervention and 4 control group classes).

Focus of the questionnaires and interviews

- Biographical information
- Experiences with languages
- Attitudes towards languages and language learning
- Representations of their experience of foreign language learning
- Self-perceptions as monolinguals or multilinguals
- How significant others perceive the respondent's views of languages and language learning.

Questionnaire overview: language(s) studied
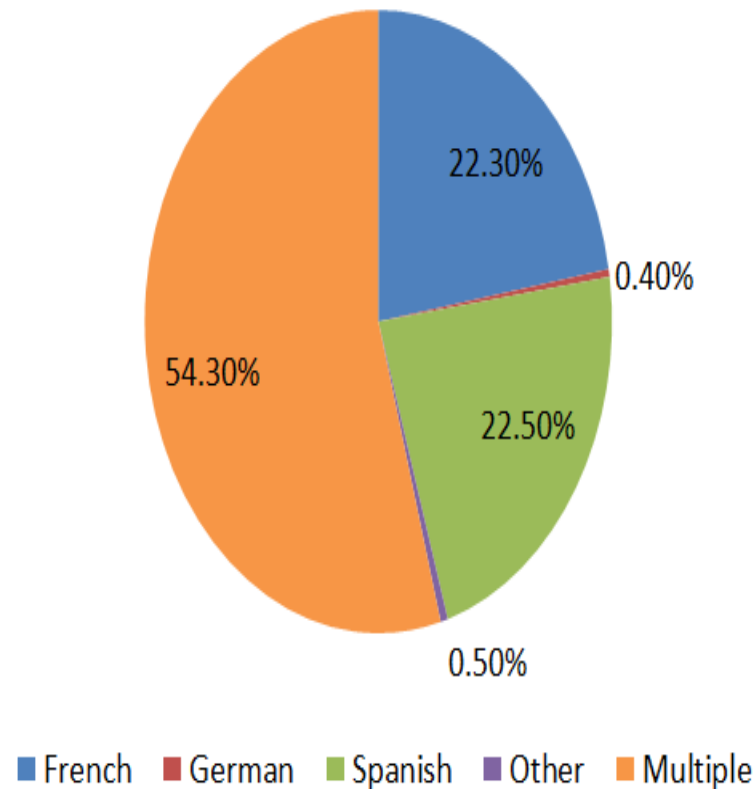
Summary of results

- There is some evidence in the questionnaire data to suggest that those who identify themselves as being more multilingual…
  - are more positive about the value of languages
  - are more likely to report a willingness to continue language study in the future
  - have a higher perception of their ability

- On this basis, we could hypothesise that if we can put in place an intervention to shift their dispositions towards multilingual identity and additional language learning, this may have wider-reaching implications for motivation and attainment

The need for a new pedagogy to support the development
of 'identity competence'

'Language Pedagogy Crisis' in the context of 'super-diversity' and 'super-uncertainty'

A participative turn in L2 identity research

Identity refers to "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2000: 5)

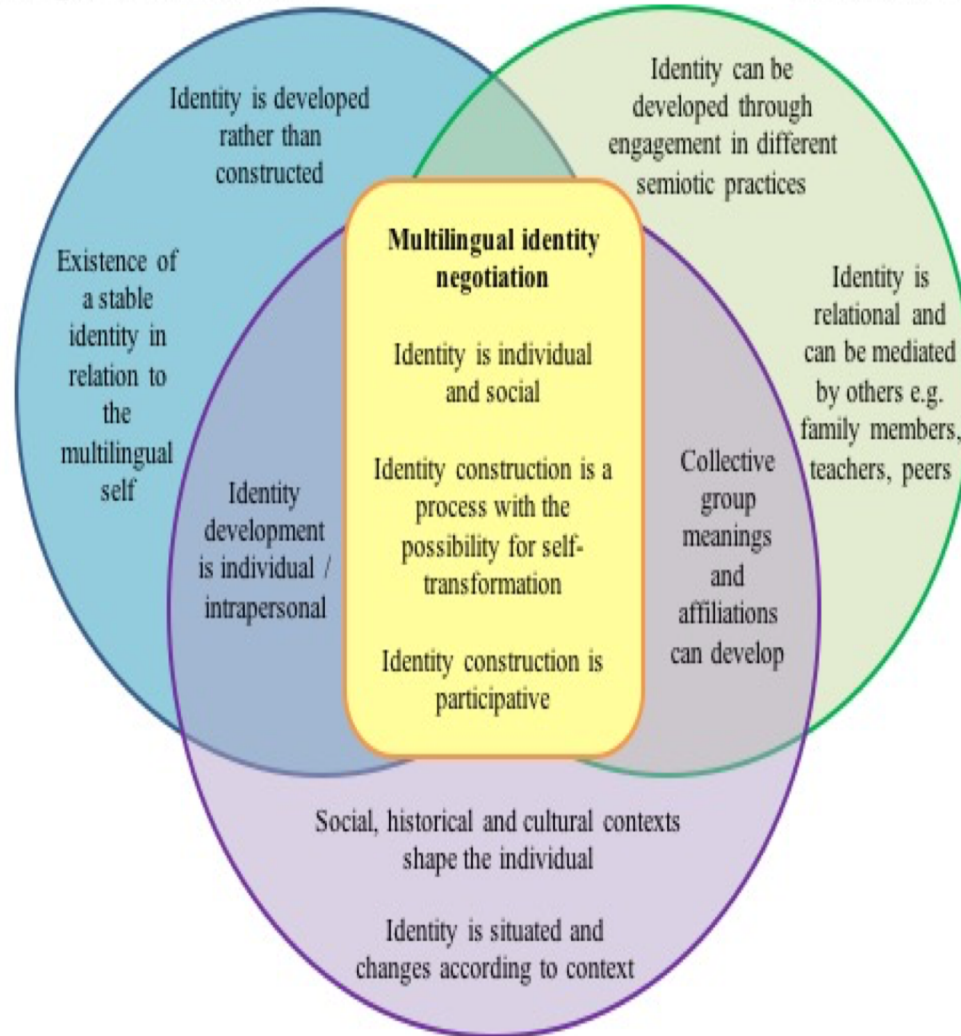Psychosocial: Identity is developed rather than constructed (Erickson, 1968)

Sociocultural: Identity is relational, mediated and situated (Vygotsky, 1978)

Poststructuralist: Identity is dynamic, multiple and shifting (Norton, 2000)

Emancipative: Identity is empowering, transforming and enduring (MEITS, 2017)

Psychological/Intramental

Identity is developed rather than constructed

Existence of a stable identity in relation to the multilingual self

Identity development is individual / intrapersonal

Social/Relational

Identity can be developed through engagement in different semiotic practices

Identity is relational and can be mediated by others e.g. family members, teachers, peers

Collective group meanings and affiliations can develop

Multilingual identity negotiation

Identity is individual and social

Identity construction is a process with the possibility for self-transformation

Identity construction is participative

Social, historical and cultural contexts shape the individual

Identity is situated and changes according to context

Historical/Contextual
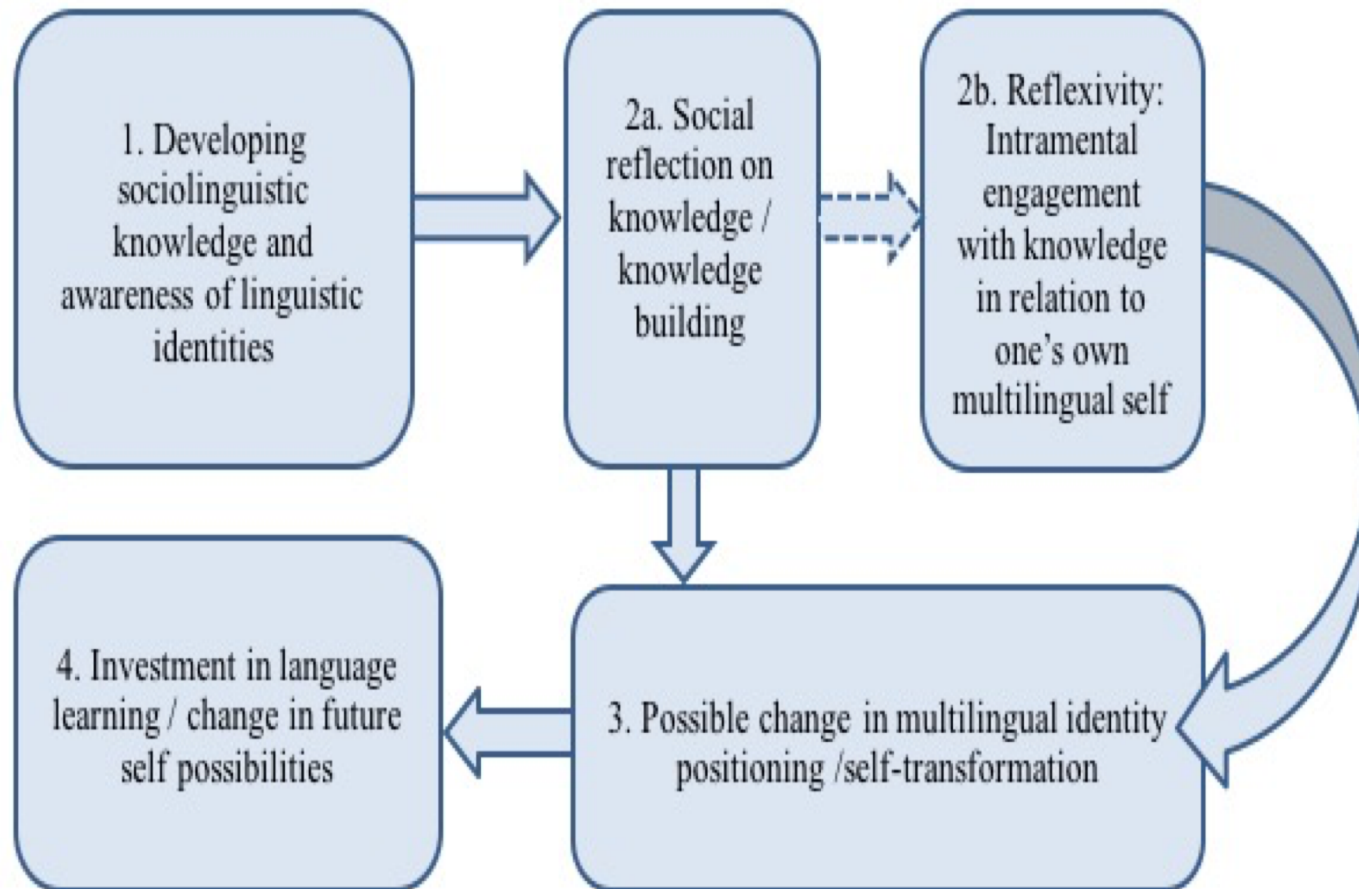
The design principles of identity-focused language pedagogy

Temporality: a longitudinal design and sustained intervention

Space: MFL classrooms as sites for negotiation of multilingual identities

Multimodality: multidimensionality and diversity of tasks

Reflexivity: metacognition and development of agency through reflection

Participation: multi-level involvement of students, teachers and parents

1. Developing sociolinguistic knowledge and awareness of linguistic identities

2a. Social reflection on knowledge / knowledge building

2b. Reflexivity: Intramental engagement with knowledge in relation to one's own multilingual self

4. Investment in language learning / change in future self possibilities

3. Possible change in multilingual identity positioning /self-transformation

LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Intervention groups

3 intervention groups per school
(4 schools total)

Group 1
Full intervention

2 elements:

a) Information about multilingualism + b) active engagement with identity-related tasks

Group 2
Partial intervention

2 elements:

a) Information about multilingualism presented to students + b) follow-up tasks

Group 3
No intervention

0 elements:

Normal lessons

Fisher, L. et al. (2018) "Participative multilingual identity construction in the languages classroom: a multi-theoretical conceptualisation"
International Journal of Multilingualism

www.meits.org