THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN BRIDGING RESEARCH ON MULTILINGUALISM AND SOCIETY

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Bi/multilingualism over the lifespan
Joining the dots

... among different subfields of research on language, language learning, and bilingualism, and different populations

... between research and society

MORE INFORMATION = BETTER DECISIONS
• Founded in October 2008

• A Centre of Excellence at the University of Edinburgh in October 2014

• Bilingualism Matters spins out of the UoE in August 2021 as a non-profit social enterprise focusing on network activities; official launch: 30 March 2022
Bilingualism Matters: the international network

30 BM branches in the UK (3), Europe (19), US (4), Canada (1), the Middle East (1), China (1), Australia (1)
Bilingualism Matters: most recent branch (22 November 2022)

Bologna

Bilingualism Matters@Bologna, within the School of Education Studies 'Giovanni Maria Bertin' of the Alma Mater University, is a centre for Public Engagement whose members are committed to sharing the latest research on bilingualism with the local community, through the organisation of information and training events aimed at educators, teachers, students, families and care professionals; the publication and dissemination of information material in several languages; and the active participation of its members in research-training-action projects on bilingualism and language learning.
International network: future members

Soon opening:

Monash University, Australia (4 April)
University of California@Irvine, US (22 April)
Università di Urbino, Italy (9 May)

Expressions of interest from:

- University of British Columbia
- University of Florida
- University of Texas, El Paso
- Carinthia University, Austria
- Western Sydney University, Australia
- University of Arizona
- Stellenbosch University, South Africa
- Asociación Chilena de Neuroaprendizaje
- .... and others
BM members

Branch members

Individual members
• staff and students of existing branches
• staff and students of unaffiliated universities
• professionals
• community members
• honorary members

Organisational members
• private sector
• non profit and for profit
Bilingualism Matters Board of Directors

Prof Antonella Sorace  
BM Founding Director

Dr Katarzyna Przybycien  
BM Director / CEO

Prof Tanja Rinker  
BM Director
Memorandum of agreement & code values

Bilingualism Matters International Network
Memorandum of Understanding

Platform

§ 1 Background
Bilingualism Matters International Network stems out of the Bilingualism Matters (BM) Research and Information Centre at the University of Edinburgh. BM was founded by Professor Antonella Sorace in 2003 aims to bridge the gap between research and different sectors of society, enabling people to make informed professional or personal decisions on bilingualism and language learning that are based on facts rather than prejudices, misconceptions, or misinterpretation of current research findings. The objectives of BM are outlined in the separate document (attached).

The Memorandum of Understanding defines the scope of collaboration and relationship between BM branches within the network.

§ 2 Difference between BM Branches and Members of BM International Network
BM Branches sign a legal contract with BM@Edinburgh (i.e., their organisation with the University of Edinburgh).
Members of BM International Network sign this Memorandum of Agreement in addition to the contract with BM@Edinburgh.

In order to become a member of BM International Network, an organisation needs to become a branch of BM first.

§ 3 Member’s Benefits
- Membership in a global community of researchers and practitioners dedicated to investigating and promoting bilingualism
- Knowledge exchange within the network
- Access to resources developed across the network
- Joint funding applications
- Access to a mature network of organisations enabling effective global dissemination of local research results
- Shared information website on bilingualism featuring branches, researchers and research results
- Shared promotional materials for the network (leaflets)
- Cross network invitations to lectures and placements
- Access to network funding for attendance of network meetings

- Recognition that all types of bilingualism in all languages are equally valuable
- Public engagement is a vital part of branches work
- Public engagement is based on solid research results and feeds back into better research
- Collaboration
- Multidisciplinarity
Bilingualism Matter community: students

New students’ community

Student-led projects

Training

Student representatives on the Advisory Board
Bilingualism Matters Network: collective events

ANNUAL events

- BM Research Symposium
- Knowledge Exchange Event (next one: 24 May 2023)
- AGM

All year round

- Workshops & events online
From research to the community, and back again
More insightful cross-disciplinary research

The experience of public engagement gives

• a better understanding of the contexts of research questions and more research insights
• a better ability to communicate across disciplinary boundaries
Research
EU-funded projects

- Piccolingo
- School and Family Together
- Let’s Become a Bilingual Family!
- AThEME: Advancing the European Multilingual Experience
Bilingualism Matters Network: current collaborative projects

Teacher Education About Multilingualism

Bilingualism Matters in the Waterloo Region and Canada
Student training and experience

• Students and visitors volunteer to assist with particular BM activities or projects.

• Training and opportunities to talk to the general public and engage in community projects.

• This experience is increasingly valued by employers.
Partnerships and collaborations in the UK
Wider partnerships and collaborations
National and international science festivals and societies
Bilingualism Matters: our mission

MYTHS

FACTS

SCIENCE
Old myths

Confusion

Problems at school

‘Useful’ and ‘not useful’ languages

- TOO LATE TO LEARN A LANGUAGE WELL
- RULES AND CORRECTION AS ONLY WAY TO LEARN
- L1 EFFECTS ON THE L2 (BUT NO L2 EFFECT ON THE L1)
Many possible (linguistic, cognitive, social) effects
It doesn’t matter *which* languages

• It’s the fact of having more than one language that matters, regardless of modality.

• **THERE ARE NO ‘MORE USEFUL’ OR ‘LESS USEFUL’ LANGUAGES FROM THIS POINT OF VIEW!**
New myths

BILINGUAL CHILDREN ARE GENIUSES!

BILINGUALS DON’T GET ALZHEIMER’S!
These benefits are not always found in all bilinguals because the type of **bilingual experience** plays a role: language distance, patterns of use, exposure to variation, attitudes, individual differences....
“Bilingual” → NOT the sum of two monolinguals

However, many educational and diagnostic tests are still based on monolingual norms

• Risk of over/under-diagnosis: some typical delays and mistakes in bilingual children may look like speech impairments but in most cases are not.
Out of the world’s approximately 7.5 billion inhabitants, 1.5 billion speak English (20% of the Earth’s population)

About 360 million people speak English as their first language.

English is by far the most commonly studied foreign language in the world, followed by French at a distant second.
“Privileged monolingualism” in the Anglosphere

• The UK had the worst language skills of all countries in the EU.

• Lack of language skills costs the UK economy £48 billion a year.
Roughly 6,000 to 7,000 languages spoken worldwide

- 25 languages account for more than half of the world’s populations

- The vast majority of languages are minority languages in every country in which they are spoken.
Some challenges for BM

- Which research? Whose research?
- Learning to communicate clearly
- Universities tend to attach great importance to ‘impact’ but on a competitive, rather than collaborative, basis
- Understanding the practices of policy making
Some challenges for BM

• Connecting and coordinating actions (within countries, across countries)

• Integrating different kinds of research expertise and public engagement experiences

• Exercising a political (non-partisan) role
Today’s presentations

• Altman: BM’s work with multiple minority communities in Israel, facing the challenges of the Covid pandemic

• Barni: ‘Third mission’ new citizens, and the visibility of BM’s impact on politics

• Blanchette: Making research a point of reference for policy-making

• Busby: The relationship between of English and Norwegian in Norwegian universities
Thank you!

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Twitter: @BilingMatters
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/bilingmatters