

Chapter 5

Embracing Advances in AI-Based Language Tools in EAP Programs: Towards a Plurilingual Shift

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ABSTRACT

The chapter calls for a change in language teaching and learning methodologies to keep pace with recent technological advances. It acknowledges the prevalence of conversational artificial intelligence tools like Chatbots, including ChatGPT and Bing. Many students and teachers are already using these tools, albeit discreetly. Instead of ignoring or dismissing, the authors argue for their integration into teaching practices. They discuss both opportunities and challenges associated with the implementation of AI tools, considering the current debate surrounding their controversial use and the dominance of a monolingual orientation in English for Academic Purposes courses. By proposing a shift in current practices, the authors advocate for an asset-based, language-friendly, and technology-enriched pedagogy. This new pedagogical approach aims to promote learner autonomy, linguistic and cultural inclusion, and more individualized instruction. By implementing such a pedagogy, teachers can better meet the individual needs of their students leveraging the benefits of these technologies to enhance learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Current globalization and migration trends have contributed to a growth of international student admissions in post-secondary education in Canada. According to the Canadian Bureau of International Education (2023), there was a 43 percent increase in international student enrollment between 2017 and 2022. Moreover, over the last decade, there was a nearly 170 percent increase in international student arrivals, representing the largest growth in Canadian higher education to date. To ensure that international students are well-prepared to embark on their studies in English, many Canadian colleges and universities offer English for Academic Purposes (from now on EAP) bridging programs. These programs typically range from two to twelve months in duration and aim to equip students with the necessary language and literacy skills to succeed in their academic trajectory. The successful completion of EAP courses can serve as proof of required language proficiency for university admissions, after which students are eligible to take university credit courses in the service of their degree. Despite COVID-19 related interruptions in international travel and shifts to online modes of instruction in higher education between 2020 and 2022, EAP bridging programs have remained instrumental for offering English language support to international students to adapt to the academic requirements of their chosen Canadian university.

Most English for Academic Purposes bridging programs are conducted prior to a student's eligibility to enroll in credit courses. In the event of failure, the student is typically required to retake the EAP course or to achieve a minimum accepted IELTS exam score; in some cases, this may result in a term of waiting before starting the next academic year. Due to these implications, these courses are considered high stakes.

Recent research conducted in Canada (see, for instance, Chen, 2019; Galante, 2018; Marshall & Moore, 2013, 2018) and worldwide (e.g., Canagarajah, 2011; Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; Garcia & Sylvan, 2011; Khote, 2018; Piccardo, 2018) suggests that *language friendly instruction* offers several advantages for the development of academic language skills. Language friendly pedagogy has been defined as the mobilization of learners' linguistic talents and achievements in the development of the target language skills (Le Pichon & Kambel, 2022). Language friendly instruction, also called *plurilingual instruction* (Piccardo, 2018), consists of leveraging students' overall linguistic abilities for the development of academic language skills (Le Pichon & Kambel, 2022; Piccardo, 2018). Additionally, incorporating students' home languages not only hold the potential to enhance their academic proficiency but also empowers them to express their agency and strengthen their sense of identity (Cummins & Early, 2015; Extra & Yagmur, 2012; Le Pichon & Kambel, 2022; Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014). Despite these advantages, teachers of bridging EAP classes often neglect the inclusion of students' linguistic and/or cultural knowledge. Moreover, teaching exclusively in the target language, as advocated by Krashen's *comprehensible input hypothesis* (Krashen, 1985), can overwhelm learners cognitively and hinder their progress. To address this, teachers can alleviate cognitive overload by tapping into students' linguistic repertoires.

Instruction in EAP courses relies primarily on what Gogolin called *monolingual habitus* (Gogolin, 1997), which is a set of assumptions rooted in the belief that language learning should occur in the majority language. The notion of a monolingual habitus, traditionally reflected in monoglossic norms of most education systems in North America, fails to address the academic and social needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse language learner (Gogolin, 2006). The term *monoglossic* was introduced by Blommaert (2010) to characterize a system that can be either monolingual, bilingual or multilingual, but that upholds an educational framework where languages are kept separate from each other. In a monoglossic system, languages are treated as distinct entities with little interaction between them within the

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