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Compendium to the master thesis

## **Plurilingualism and interculturality in the education area**

What are the challenges for teachers of French as a foreign language?

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The school is where institutional learning takes place: it welcomes the learning of school subjects, but it is also where the institutional encounter with the other occurs, whether the other is a pupil or a teacher. School is a place of learning and questioning, of discovery and confrontation with others. The foreign language course is the field of action above all, where our vision of the world is called into question. Indeed, more than a juxtaposition of words, language conveys our way of being and seeing the world, it is the expression of our vision and understanding of it, it is the conscious and unconscious claim of a cultural belonging. To teach a foreign language is, within this educational institution that is the school, to confront its pupils with the questions of linguistic and cultural identities. But in what framework, and with what tools? Are educational institutions at European and national level able to respond to pupil profiles in order to provide teachers with appropriate guidelines and tools?

With the subject: "Plurilinguism and interculturality in the education area - What are the challenges for teachers of French as a foreign language?" The aim of this thesis is to identify and analyse the institutional solutions and the perception of foreign language teachers of their own plurilingualism in the intercultural and plurilingual contexts that are foreign language courses. After defining the theoretical framework, we will present and analyse the linguistic portraits, inspired by those of Krumm (2010), of three teachers of French as a foreign language. Then we will discuss the results obtained.

This research will focus on two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The institutional framework provides teachers with the tools they need to deal with the multilingual and intercultural challenges of foreign language courses.

Hypothesis 2: Foreign language teachers are aware of their own plurilingualism and its contribution to their learners.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Definition of terms**

#### **2.1.1. Plurilingualism and linguistic identity**

In 1966, Bourdieu stressed the urgency for the French school model to evolve in order to put an end to this playground of "indifference to differences". Thirty years later, Allemann-Ghionda, De Goumoëns and Perregaux (1999) insist on the change in the profile of the school population. Political crises and population movements have accentuated the diversity of the profile and origin of pupils within classes and the term "language of schooling" has replaced that of "mother tongue". The observation of the main chronological benchmarks of the Council of Europe's Language Policy Programme between 1954 and 2018 (Appendix 1) shows a semantic evolution.

How is plurilingualism different from multilingualism? While multilingualism refers to the knowledge of several languages, plurilingualism refers to the coexistence of different languages in a given space, a given society. (Conseil de l'Europe, 2001). A plurilingual approach in language classes thus designates the interaction between the foreign language being taught, the language of schooling, but also all the languages known by the group as a whole. However, Coste, Moore and Zarate (2009) point out that the school does not encourage the development of language skills that would not be part of those taught in class. This position implicitly leads to a hierarchy of languages and cultures which is reinforced in France by the title of the foreign language courses since it is a question of " modern language 1 " and " modern language 2 ".

### **2.1.2. Interculturalities**

The interculturality is the set of relations and interactions between different cultures. The choice of the plural is explained on one hand by the metaphor of the iceberg proposed by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) to define culture : culture consists of three strata: a visible part of the iceberg (objects), a part located at the water's edge (values and norms) and an immersed part (often elusive to anyone outside a given culture). On the other hand, the people and cultures present in the class are varied in age and social situation.

We cannot approach the language course without mentioning intercultural skills. Unesco's book *Compétences interculturelles : cadre conceptuel et opérationnel* (2013) brings together the different elements of intercultural competence in a pictorial representation: a tree. (Appendix 2). If this representation makes it possible to visually delimit the subject, this symbolic tree refers to an overly static image. A kaleidoscope would seem more appropriate because this optical instrument reflects colours and external light by offering each observer a unique combination.

In this research we use the term "intercultural competence", which Byram (2009) refers to as the ability to experience and analyse cultural otherness in order to reflect on one's own culture.

### **2.1.3. Teaching French as a foreign language**

While the delimitation to the French language is justified by personal interests, the use of the expression "French as a foreign language" is anchored in a theoretical framework. Language didactics distinguish second language courses from foreign language courses. The second language is the official language of the country where teaching is carried out, whereas in the case of learning a foreign language, the linguistic environment is restricted to the classroom.

## **2.2. State of play and available tools**

### **2.2.1. Languages in foreign language courses**

The internal richness of languages is only rarely mobilized as a resource to make learners aware of varieties that are more standard (Coste, 2013). Similarly, openness to learners' first languages would enable them to better grasp the richness of their identity and to become aware of their linguistic and cultural belonging.

In 2018, the European Commission notes the need to support and to encourage the knowledge of languages in general and particularly languages that are not taught at school but are part of the students' identity. This support takes the form of a "European Language Portfolio" which is a tool to be used without distinction in class or outside the classroom to accompany personal learning.

The "Platform of resources and references for plurilingual and intercultural education" is another initiative of the Language Policy Unit of the Council of Europe, but due to its format, this platform mainly serves as a theoretical toolbox.

### **2.2.2. Language learning: part of a politico-linguistic context**

The need to take into account the plurality of language situations and to highlight the language skills of learners is particularly obvious in the changes in the formulation of the criteria and expectations for the assessment of language skills illustrated in Annex 3. It no longer refers to "native speakers" but to "speakers of the target language" or "competent speakers of the target language". This implies that a non-native speaker is able to reach a linguistic level equivalent to that of a native speaker. On the other hand, one pedagogical approach in particular: "l'éveil au langage"<sup>1</sup> Perregaux (1998), Candelier (2003) makes it possible to integrate, through reading and play, the languages and cultures of pupils in school. One example is the Kamishibai plurilingual competition of DULALA, which is a national resource and training center on bilingualism and plurilingual education. The multilingual

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<sup>1</sup> which we translate as "language awareness"

Kamishibai uses the combination of writing, visual arts, theatre and reading, by mixing different languages and building links between them.

The evolution of concepts and measures put in place to respond to the undeniable presence of a plurality of languages and cultures in schools seem difficult to go further than the theoretical framework. But there has been gradual progress and the creation of new tools is promising.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Linguistic portrait**

The support selected for this research was presented to us during the second semester of the Master of Regional and European Project Management and more precisely during the first seminar "SPR902 Multilingualism". Prof. Dr. Nadine Rentel then asked us to introduce ourselves to the group according to the "Konzepte der Sprachidentität". Participants are invited to present a colouring silhouette of themselves in order to show their linguistic biography. These figures allow to analyse our own perception and relationship to languages. It seemed appropriate to propose to the participants to colour not one but two linguistic figures: one representing them as a foreign language teacher, the other being their figure apart from work.

The target audience consisting of ten foreign language teachers working in Germany, Serbia, the Czech Republic, Brazil and the Netherlands were contacted by e-mail. The geographical distance of the participants explains the choice of sending an email. Figure 3 was accompanied by a text containing the title of this research and the origin of the linguistic portraits. In order to break the hierarchy between interviewer and respondent of which Kauffmann (1996) speaks, the text accompanying the presentation of the subject was not written in a formal style but in

a style close to conversation. But since I am a friend of each participant, it was crucial to have as little influence as possible on their output.

### **3.2. The participants**

The term "participant" is used in French in the feminine form as they are all women. It should be noted that of the ten teachers who were contacted, three took part in this research. Now they will be designated by their profession as "Enseignante" together with the first letter of their first name.

Enseignante C : She comes from a French-German family. The languages spoken at home were German and French plus Italian with one of her grandparents. We met at the Freie Universität in Berlin while she was returning from an Erasmus stay in Aix-en-Provence and was studying to become a French and Italian teacher. She has been for three years now a full professor of French as a foreign language and Italian as a foreign language in a primary school in Berlin. We communicate both in French and German.

Enseignante G : Originally from Lower Saxony, she taught French at a high school in Hanover until her retirement in June 2018. She was my tutor when I was a French assistant in this school. During the classes we only communicate in French but all our exchanges outside our lessons took place and still take place in German.

Enseignante K : This Serbian teacher holds a master's degree in French language and literature from the Faculty of Philology in Novi Sad, Serbia. It is within the framework of her compulsory internship and my European Voluntary Service in Teaching French as a Foreign Language in a French-Serbian kindergarten in Novi Sad that we met. She teaches French as a foreign language in a school in Novi Sad. We exclusively communicate in Serbian.

This sample cannot be considered as representative, but as part of a qualitative approach.



## 4. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

### 4.1. Figures of plurilingualism

The research was conducted in French and German and the instructions in the support provided to the participants are in both languages for several reasons. On the one hand French is the working language of the participants and the language of this research, on the other hand German, although it is not part of Enseignante K's languages, is the language of Krumm's research work (2001). The e-mail introducing the research subject was written exclusively in French. Unconsciously, the instructions were already based on the participants' plurilingual skills. However, if my approach disregarded respect for the languages we use in our private exchanges, the instruction stated that their response could be in the language of their choice and they all reaffirmed our linguistic habitus in their text.

These linguistic portraits are more than an enumeration of the languages of the participants they introduce and link emotions and colours in each of the figures. The choice of colours echoes for two languages: blue for English and red for French. Enseignante K justifies the use of blue by explaining that English is always present and widespread like the sky, while Enseignante C associates it with dreams. Auger, Molinié, Goï and Guillaumin link imaginary questions to otherness (2011) because when we represent ourselves we do it both to ourselves and to others. The colour red is symbolically linked to love for Enseignante K and Enseignante G. By Enseignante C, the evocation of love is also to be found in the enumeration justifying her choice.

The diversity of adjectives and colours indicates that Teachers C, G and K are aware of the complexity of language relationships. The coexistence of all these languages in the same space - the space of their silhouette - here symbolizes their plurilingualism.

## 4.2. Languages and interculturality

The plurality of linguistic identities is embodied by the change in position of the languages-colours in the different parts of the body according to whether it is a question of the figure in the professional or personal context. These differences are explained by the use of one language more than another depending on the situation. These explanations overlap across the entire data set. It is important to mention that Enseignante C chose to complete only one figure because she does not make any difference between her as a teacher and in daily life (Appendix 5). Enseignante G and Enseignante K operate a hierarchisation of the languages position on the figures corresponding to the function they associate with this part of their body. French in the heart but also in the head when they teach. This notion of hierarchy also appears in the representation of Enseignante G who places the less-used languages at the bottom, at the level of her feet. English and Italian are associated with the adjective "burie". This points to the level of knowledge of a language and recalls the concept of "linguistic insecurity" (Calvet, 1993), that gap between the representation of the practice and the actual practice.

As the linguistic level is not illustrated or formulated by the participants, we cannot prejudge any difficulties or easiness that may arise for them in learning the mentioned languages. This classification, if not that of language level, is that of the representation of utility (Beacco and Byram, 2007) that the participants have and springs up in the figures of Enseignante K. While in everyday life the languages are distributed vertically in her head, in the teaching context they are ordered horizontally.

The separation between the place granted to languages also poses by extension the question of the coexistence and mutual contribution of different cultures. It is interesting to note that the linguistic portrait of Enseignante C, is the only one that does not give a precise place to one language, each one intermingling with the others.

### 4.3. Didactics in practice

In order to facilitate the learning of French to her learners, Enseignante K does not use their native language but English which is an other foreign language for them. As opposed to what Coste (2013) argues, Enseignante K takes into consideration the foreign language skills of her learners and uses them as a springboard to facilitate their French learning. This approach echoes Robert (2013) for whom the English language has many homographs and shares a similar grammatical construction with the French one, offering a field of crosscomprehension favourable to the apprenticeship of French.

Enseignante K is the only one to mirror her linguistic knowledge with that of her students in French as a foreign language classes. We can therefore question the teacher's acknowledgement of the profile and plural identities of their students. Indeed, after sending their linguistic portraits, each participant has asked for more details about the research conducted. The resulting personal exchanges raise questions about the knowledge of those working in the field of the tools made available to them by the European institutions, since only the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* is known and used to attest to the linguistic skills of their pupils.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1. Main results

If the literature review presents the creation of educational tools by European and educational institutions and framework references to guide the teaching of foreign languages, the implementation in the field of these recommendations and suggestions can be challenged. Teacher G is the only one to mention her participation in professional projects.

None of the participants presents in their linguistic profiles the places or reasons for learning the languages represented, but they justify their use by the context and/or their interlocutor. If, for personal and professional reasons, the participants are aware of their own linguistic diversity, they do not seem aware of the plurilingualism of their learners. Indeed, none of the pupils' native languages other than the schooling language appears in the portraits. The learners' languages are therefore not, as Coste deploras, taken into consideration as possible points of support (2013) or language-bridge (Klein, 2002) to promote intercomprehension and highlight the group's interculturalities.

The three participants are French as a foreign language teachers in their home countries. We might expect to see only two languages (French and the language of the country) in their portraits, but each of them has two other languages in common: English and Italian, to which Enseignante C and Enseignante K also add Spanish. The presence of Italian and Spanish would make it easier to learn a foreign language from the same linguistic family, in this case Romance languages, when another Romance language is already mastered.

## 5.2. Criticisms

First of all, my connection to the subject was double-edged in the development of this research. On the one hand, my relationship with the participants made me exclude the use of interviews in an effort to orient their responses so little as possible. On the other hand, it was not easy to put aside my experiences and personal interest in the theoretical part.

If this distance was time consuming, it revealed the importance of bibliographic work and the referencing of sources. The verification of some references showed me that nobody is safe from misreferencing. In addition, I remain dissatisfied with the equilibrium of my quotations or with the formulation of certain references that burden the reading. Furthermore, a lack of precision on my side led to a late reception of the linguistic portraits. Moreover, the format of the linguistic portraits, although highly visual, does not entirely satisfy me because the output is far from being the most comprehensible for the reader. However, this format allowed the participants to re-appropriate the support through variations in the layout and location of the explanations.

Finally, the small number of participants constitutes a limit to this research and narrows the scope. This research would have been more in-depth if one of the profiles had been that of a French as a foreign language teacher working in a country whose language of instruction she/he does not master. However, this does not prevent an analysis and interpretation of the perception of the three participants, their plurilingualism and the interculturalities at stake.

## 6. PROPOSALS

Further research would allow the reflection model proposed by the linguistic portraits to be pursued. A class-teacher group interview would allow a cross-analysis. However, this method may obstruct the act of speech as the hierarchy between the teacher and his or her learners will potentially be present.

The participant-observation proposed by Olivier de Sardan (1995) would then be a possibility to investigate in order to form a corpus of observation of the use of the linguistic portrait and its impact in foreign language courses. This corpus of observation would then introduce reflection within a class, but this reflection would only be a milestone in the construction of an identity and a linguistic variety within the foreign language class. This would make the foreign language classroom a place for the coexistence of languages and the plurilinguistic and intercultural skills of each individual, and not a hierarchisation of one language at the expense of another. Although the classroom walls form the visible boundary of the classroom area, it is the interaction games and recognition of multiple linguistic identities that form the classroom group and shape the edges of a collective identity (Blanchet, 2000).

Each course is unique, however a common line of conduct, the curriculum, regulates major trends at the national or federal level. However, this research cannot claim to question curricula or it cannot propose to integrate linguistic portraits into the curricula of modern language courses. But these programmes that try to take into consideration the needs and individuality of their learners seem to forget to integrate the particular profile of foreign language teachers. The Erasmus+ programme (key action 1 - Mobility of education and training staff), which enables the observation and exchange of good practice, would thus benefit from being better known.

## 7. CONCLUSION

"Plurilinguism and interculturality in the education area - What are the challenges for teachers of French as a foreign language? ". The aim of this thesis was to identify and analyse institutional solutions and teachers' perceptions of their own plurilingualism in the intercultural and plurilingual contexts of foreign language courses.

The implementation of the theoretical framework and of the inventory highlights an evolution of approaches in language teaching. National and European educational institutions have grasped the extent of the changes needed to ensure that the proposed language pedagogy corresponds to societal realities. However, analyses of the linguistic portraits of three French as a foreign language teachers, while sketching an awareness of the linguistic interactions of each, do not allow us to affirm that these French as a foreign language teachers perceive this plurilingualism as an added value for their learners.

Thus, although the tools and projects proposed cross the gap between theory and practice, there is still a long way to go to ensure them a more prominent place on school benches.