

LINGUISTIC DIVERSIFICATION AND THE CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT: Purpose of this work is to define the appropriate techniques and tools to develop young learners' speaking skills in EFL CEFR

KEY WORDS: phrase, sentence predicate, word order, adverbial modifier, transitive verb, intransitive verb, linking verb, lexical, stative verbs.

Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw.

The customary approach is to present learning a foreign language as an addition, in a compartmentalised way, of a competence to communicate in a foreign language to the competence to communicate in the mother tongue. The concept of plurilingual and pluricultural competence tends to:

- move away from the supposed balanced dichotomy established by the customary L1/L2 pairing by stressing plurilingualism where bilingualism is just one particular case;
- consider that a given individual does not have a collection of distinct and separate competences to communicate depending on the languages he/she knows, but rather a plurilingual and pluricultural competence encompassing the full range of the languages available to him/her;
- stress the pluricultural dimensions of this multiple competence but without necessarily suggesting links between the development of abilities concerned with relating to other cultures and the development of linguistic communicative proficiency.

A general observation can nevertheless be made, linking different distinct language learning components and paths. It is generally the case that language teaching in schools has to a large extent tended to stress objectives concerned with either the individual's *general competence* (especially at primary school level) or *communicative language competence* (particularly for those aged between 11 and 16), while courses for adults (students or people already working) formulate objectives in terms of specific *language activities* or functional ability in a particular *domain*. This emphasis, in the case of the former on the construction and development of competences, and in the latter case on optimal preparation for activities concerned with functioning in a specific

context, corresponds no doubt to the distinct roles of general initial education on the one hand, and specialised and continuing education on the other. In this context, rather than treating these as opposites, the common framework of reference can help to relate these different practices with respect to one another and show that they should in fact be complementary.

Options for curricular design

Diversification within an overall concept

Discussion about curricula in relation to the Framework may be guided by three main principles.

The first is that discussion on curricula should be in line with the overall objective of promoting plurilingualism and linguistic diversity. This means that the teaching and learning of any one language should also be examined in conjunction with the provision for other languages in the education system and the paths which learners might choose to follow in the long term in their efforts to develop a variety of language skills.

The second principle is that this diversification is only possible, particularly in schools, if the cost efficiency of the system is considered, so as to avoid unnecessary repetition and to promote the economies of scale and the transfer of skills which linguistic diversity facilitates. If, for example, the education system allows pupils to begin learning two foreign languages at a pre-determined stage in their studies, and provides for optional learning of a third language, the objectives or kinds of progression in each of the chosen languages need not necessarily be the same (e.g. the starting point need not always be preparation for functional interaction satisfying the same communicative needs nor would one necessarily continue to emphasise learning strategies).

The third principle is, therefore, that considerations and measures relating to curricula should not just be limited to a curriculum for each language taken in isolation, nor even an integrated curriculum for several languages. They should also be approached in terms of their role in a general language education, in which linguistic knowledge (*savoir*) and skills (*savoir-faire*), along with the ability to learn (*savoir-apprendre*), play not only a specific role in a given language but also a transversal or transferable role across languages.

From the partial to the transversal

Between 'related' languages in particular – though not just between these – knowledge and skills may be transferred by a kind of osmosis. And, with reference to curricula, it should be stressed that:

- all knowledge of a language is partial, however much of a 'mother tongue' or 'native language' it seems to be. It is always incomplete, never as developed or perfect in an ordinary individual as it would be for the utopian, 'ideal native speaker'. In addition, a

given individual never has equal mastery of the different component parts of the language in question (for example of oral and written skills, or of comprehension and interpretation compared to production skills);

- any partial knowledge is also more than it might seem. For instance, in order to achieve the 'limited' goal of increasing understanding of specialised texts in a given foreign language on very familiar subjects it is necessary to acquire knowledge and skills which can also be used for many other purposes. Such 'spin-off' value is however a matter for the learner rather than the responsibility of the curriculum planner;
- those who have learnt one language also know a great deal about many other languages without necessarily realising that they do. The learning of further languages generally facilitates the activation of this knowledge and increases awareness of it, which is a factor to be taken into account rather than proceeding as if it did not exist.

Although leaving a very broad freedom of choice in drawing up curricula and progression, these different principles and observations also aim to encourage efforts to adopt a transparent and coherent approach when identifying options and making decisions. It is in this process that a framework of reference will be of particular value.

Towards curriculum scenarios

Curriculum and variation of objectives

From the above, it can be seen that each of the major components and sub components of the proposed model may, if selected as a main learning objective, result in various choices in relation to content approaches and means to facilitate successful learning. For example, whether it is a matter of 'skills' (general competences of the individual learner/language user) or the 'sociolinguistic component' (within communicative language competence) or strategies, or comprehension (under the heading of language activities), in each case it is a question of components (and for quite distinct elements of the taxonomy proposed in the Framework) upon which a curriculum might or might not place emphasis and which might be considered in different instances as an objective, a means or a prerequisite. And for each of these components the question of the internal structure adopted (for example, which sub-components to select in the sociolinguistic component? how to sub-categorise strategies?) and the criteria for any system of progression over time (e.g. linear ranking of different types of comprehension activities?) could at least be identified and considered, if not treated in detail. This is the direction in which the other sections of this document invite the reader to approach the questions and consider the options appropriate to his or her own particular situation.

This 'exploded' view is all the more appropriate in the light of the generally accepted notion that the selection and ordering of objectives on which to base language learning may vary enormously depending on the context, the target group and the level in question.

Furthermore, it should be stressed that objectives for the same type of public in the same context and at the same level could also vary regardless of the weight of tradition and the constraints imposed by the education system.

The discussion surrounding modern language teaching in primary schools illustrates this in that there is a great deal of variety and controversy – at national or even regional level within a country – concerning the definition of the initial, inevitably ‘partial’ aims to be set for this type of teaching. Should pupils: learn some basic rudiments of the foreign language system (linguistic component)?; develop linguistic awareness (more general linguistic knowledge (*savoir*), skills (*savoir-faire*) and *savoir-etre*?; become.

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