MULTILINGUALISM AND THE MULTILINGUAL PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH AS AN IMPORTANT TOOL FOR THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

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Abstract

Knowledge of teachers' beliefs is central to understanding teachers' decision-making in the classroom. The present study explores international language teachers' beliefs about multilingualism and the use of a multilingual pedagogical approach in the third-language (L3) classroom. This study analysed data collected via focus group discussions with 12 teachers of French (N = 4), German (N = 2) and Spanish (N = 6) using qualitative content analysis. Three main themes emerged from the analysis. (1) The teachers view multilingualism as a potentially positive asset. Although they think that multilingualism has benefited their own language learning, they do not conclude that multilingualism is automatically an asset to students. (2) The teachers claim to make frequent use of their students' linguistic knowledge of English when teaching the L3. However, the teachers rarely focus on the transfer of learning strategies because they believe that learning an L3 is completely different from learning the second language L2 English. (3) The teachers think that collaboration across languages could enhance students' language learning; however, no such collaboration currently exists.

Key words: multilingualism, third-language learning, teachers' beliefs, multilingualpedagogy, language awareness, language learning strategies

Introduction

Multilingualism is a contemporary phenomenon We live in an epoch where being human means being multilingual. That is, multilingualism is an intrinsic part of the human condition. Some scholars refer to this condition as the new linguistic dispensation (Aronin & Singleton, 2008: 1, 12) that is the result of technological development and global economic forces. Friedman (2005) maintains that today, "the world is flat". What he implies with this metaphor is that as a consequence of technology, more people can "plug, play, compete, connect, and collaborate with more equal power than ever before" (Friedman, 2005: x). He acknowledges that this does not lead to "equal" social and economic situations (Friedman, 2005: x), but he insists that globalisation holds an "equalising" potential because many more people than ever before have access to and the ability to use the tools necessary to connect, compete and collaborate. He describes the flat-world platform as the product of the development of the personal computer, fibre-optic cable and work-flow software (Friedman, 2005: 10). When people of diverse backgrounds are in contact, they need a shared language code to facilitate communication. The incredible spread of English as a language of wider communication in the world today is closely linked to the forces of globalisation (Graddol, 1997; Pakir, 1999; Kloos, 2000). At a very basic level, the spread of English contributes to the increase of multilingualism in the world today because many people are learning English as an additional language (Kachru, 1996; Cenoz, 2009), while they continue to learn and use local languages. Paradoxically, increased global contact has simultaneously heightened appreciation for the local (Preteceille, 1990; Kloos, 2000). In the context of language, this has given rise to a re-appreciation of the value of local languages within a broader movement for linguistic rights (Kloos, 2000: 282). The tension between the local and the global is also evident in discussions of the use of English. Scholars accept that English is owned by all its users and that local and global identities are expressed in English (Schneider, 2007: 14). In the World Englishes community, Pakir (1999)

coined the term "glocal" to refer to the new use of English as a result of globalisation. "Giocal" English is useful globally, but rooted in the local contexts where it is used as additional language to express local identity (Pakir, 1999: 346). In discussions of local languages that co-exist with global English, scholars are increasingly turning to multilingual societies in Asia and Africa to deepen their understanding of how local languages are maintained in multilingual repertoires, often in the presence of English (Hornberger, 2002; Stroud, 2003). In the ambit of globalisation, multilingualism today is therefore promoted mainly as a result of two broad realities (Cenoz, 2009: 1): an increased awareness of the importance of linguistic rights Given the important role of the language teacher in promoting learners' multilingualism, research focused on teachers' knowledge and beliefs about multilingualism and multilingual pedagogical approaches is surprisingly scarce. The present research project aims to gain further insight into these issues. This study explores L3 foreign language teachers' beliefs about multilingualism and the use of a multilingual pedagogical approach in a lower secondary school setting (years 8–10). The first part of the theoretical section discusses the main principles of a multilingual pedagogy. The second part presents the previous literature regarding teachers' beliefs about multilingualism. The third part provides central background information on language learning in the school context from a multilingualism perspective In this paper, 'L3 learning' and 'multilingualism' are used as synonyms and are defined as 'the acquisition of a non-native language by learners who have previously acquired or are acquiring two other languages' Students begin by learning English, and this instruction continues when the L3 is introduced in year 8. The L3 learners in this study are regarded as multilinguals and are proficient in varying degrees in their languages: L1 Romanian, L2 English and L3 French/German/Spanish. Learners with a home language other than Romanian are also referred to as L3 learners in this study, although French, German or Spanish may actually be their L4 or L5.

Multilinguals differ from bilinguals and monolinguals in several respects. Research has shown, for example, that multilinguals demonstrate superior metalinguistic and metacognitive abilities, such as the ability to draw comparisons between different languages and to reflect on and employ appropriate learning strategies (for reviews, see Cenoz, 2003Cenoz, J. (2003The role of mother tongue literacy in third language learning. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, *3*(1), 65–81.[Taylor & Francis Online], [Google Scholar]) emphasise that multilingualism does not automatically enhance further language learning; for example, when learners are not literate in their home language, when learners are not aware of the benefits of multilingualism and 'when children are not encouraged in the school situation to rely on their different languages and language knowledge as positive resources', [Google Scholar], p. 136), Multilingualism may not provide an advantage. In fact, the general view within the field seems to be that learning multiple languages is best enhanced when learners are encouraged to become aware of and use their pre-existing linguistic and language learning knowledge. Moreover, in the school setting, the language teacher is the key facilitator of learners' multilingualism.

Multilingual pedagogy A multilingual pedagogy should be regarded not as a unified methodology but as a set of principles that are used to varying degrees in different approaches depending on the teaching context, curriculum and learners (Neuner, 2004Neuner, G. (2004). Thus, rather than attempting to maintain learners' languages in isolation, teachers should help learners to become aware of and draw on their existing knowledge. Second, learners should draw on experiences from previous language learning when learning a new language. Learners should become aware of which learning strategies they have used previously as well as reflect on, test, and evaluate the extent to which those strategies can be transferred to a new language learning context (Neuner, 2004Neuner, G. (2004). Clearly, a multilingual pedagogical approach in the classroom requires competent teachers. Based on the discussions in De Angelis (2011De Angelis, G. (2011). Teachers' beliefs about the role of prior language knowledge in learning and how these influence teaching practices. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *8*(3), 216–

234.[Taylor & Francis Online], [Google Scholar]), Hufeisen language teachers should ideally be able to meet several, if not all, of the following requirements:

- They should be multilingual themselves and serve as models for their learners.
- They should have a highly developed cross-linguistic and metalinguistic awareness.
- They should be familiar with research on multilingualism.
- They should know how to foster learners' multilingualism.
- They should be sensitive to learners' individual cognitive and affective differences.
- They should be willing to collaborate with other (language) teachers to enhance learners' multilingualism.

Teachers' beliefs strongly influence their pedagogical decisions, and such beliefs are typically resistant to change (Borg, 2006Borg, S. (2006). In this particular study, teachers' beliefs refer to 'a complex, inter-related system of often tacitly held theories, values and assumptions that the teacher deems to be true, and which serve as cognitive filters that interpret new experiences and guide the teacher's thoughts and behavior' (Mohamed, 2006Mohamed, N. (2006). An exploratory study of the interplay between teachers' beliefs, instructional practices & professional development (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Auckland, Auckland. [Google Scholar], p. 21). Because teachers' beliefs are such a strong predictor of what occurs in the classroom, researchers in the field argue that insight into teachers' beliefs is necessary to understand and improve language teaching and students' learning The following section briefly presents the general results of these studies. In the questionnaire study, De Angelis (2011De Angelis, G. (2011). Teachers' beliefs about the role of prior language knowledge in learning and how these influence teaching practices. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *8*(3), 216– 234.[Taylor & Francis Online], [Google Scholar]) investigated 176 secondary school teachers' beliefs about the role of prior language knowledge and the promotion of multilingualism in enhancing immigrant children's language learning. The teachers included in that study taught various subjects in schools in Austria, Great Britain and Italy. Some of De Angelis' main findings include the following: teachers in all three countries generally encourage learners to use their home languages, but not in the classroom; they believe that using home languages in class can delay and even impair the learning of the majority language. Many teachers claim that they never refer to learners' home language and culture in class. This finding may be linked to the prevalent belief that teachers must be familiar with learners' language to be able to help them In contrast with the study of De Angelis (2011De Angelis, G. (2011). Teachers' beliefs about the role of prior language knowledge in learning and how these influence teaching practices. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *8*(3), 216–234.[Taylor & Francis Online], [Google Scholar]), nearly all the teachers included in the study by Heyder and Schädlich were positive about the benefits of comparing languages in the classroom. These contrasting findings may indicate that language teachers have a higher awareness of multilingualism than teachers of other subjects do. Most of the teachers in the study by Heyder and Schädlich made frequent use of a contrastive approach, largely between German and the foreign language that they were teaching. Such contrasting activities typically occurred spontaneously and were rarely supported by teaching materials. Furthermore, as in the De Angelis' study, the majority of teachers were hesitant to bring other languages into the classroom unless they were familiar with them. The teachers were overly positive about activities that had the potential to promote multilingualism. However, when asked whether they actually make use of these activities, fewer than one-third of the teachers claimed to do so. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *11*(1), 97–119.[Taylor & Francis Online], [Google Scholar]) discusses the results of two studies that aimed to investigate Polish pre-service and in-service English teachers' multilingual awareness and practices. The first study employed a quantitative design and included 233 participants (pre-service and in-service teachers) who responded to questions and statements in a questionnaire. The second study was a qualitative focus group discussion with five secondary school teachers. The main results from these studies indicate that experienced in-service

teachers have greater multilingual awareness than pre-service teachers do. In addition, teachers who are multilinguals themselves appear to be more multilingually aware than teachers who have less language learning experience. What is more, the teachers' proficiency in the L3 seems to correlate with the level of awareness. Similar to the findings of De Angelis, the teachers were reluctant to refer to other languages when teaching English. Furthermore, teacher education programmes in Poland rarely seem to advocate the potential benefits of employing a multilingual pedagogical approach.

Whereas the studies discussed above investigated teachers' beliefs about multilingualism in general, Jakisch (2014Jakisch, J. (2014) conducted an interview study to explore the specific beliefs of three English teachers regarding the potential benefit of using L2 English as a door opener to learners' multilingualism. Her results indicate that the teachers in the study had not spent a significant amount of time reflecting on the issue. Nevertheless, the teachers have a positive attitude towards the idea and appear to believe that L2 English knowledge can motivate further language learning. However, the teachers were uncertain that L2 English knowledge could facilitate the learning of all languages; instead, they appear to believe that a 'prototype language' is required. The teachers are also unwilling to believe that English is the only door opener to further language learning, fearing that their subject might be reduced to an instrument for enhancing multilingualism. Except for lexical comparisons, the teachers are sceptical about contrasting English with other languages and believe that only advanced students would benefit from such activities.

Components of Multilingual Education (MLE)

"Strong Foundation" - Research shows that children whose early education is in the language of their home tend to do better in the later years of their education (Thomas and Collier, 1997).
"Strong Bridge" - an essential difference between MLE programs and rural "mother tongue education" programs is the inclusion of a guided transition from learning through the mother tongue to learning through another tongue.

Related to the emphasis on a child's mother tongue is the implicit validation of her cultural or ethnic identity by taking languages which were previously considered "non-standard" and making active use of them in the classroom. Multilingual Education in that sense underscores the importance of the child's worldview in shaping his or her learning.

Stages of the MLE programe

A widespread understanding of MLE programs (UNESCO, 2003, 2005) suggests that instruction take place in the following stages:

1. **Stage I** - learning takes place entirely in the child's home language
2. **Stage II** - building fluency in the mother tongue. Introduction of oral L2.
3. **Stage III** - building oral fluency in L2. Introduction of literacy in L2.
4. **Stage IV** - using both L1 and L2 for lifelong learning.

MLE proponents stress that the second language acquisition component is seen as a "two-way" bridge, such that learners gain the ability to move back and forth between their mother tongue and the other tongue(s), rather than simply a transitional literacy program where reading through the mother tongue is abandoned at some stage in the education.

Based on the theories of Multilingual Education that are spelled out here, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa have adopted a thematic approach to multilingual education. Using a seasonal calendar within a relevant cultural context has provided a space to the tribal children of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh to rediscover their culture through their language. The Multilingual Education in this approach emphasizes first language first in the child taking the socio- cultural curriculum in to classroom culture and then bridge to second language. In addition to the basic theory of Paulo Freire on critical pedagogy, Gramscian theory on education, Lev Vigostky's scaffolding and Piaget's theory of cognition is applied in the Multilingual Education. The unique thing in this approach is to involve the community in creating their own curriculum and minimise the theoretical hegemony,

thereby creating a new set of people who believe in the ethics of creating and sharing knowledge for the society than to limit it to the theoreticians.

Using multilingual approaches involves:

1. Recognising and valuing the multilingual nature of societies, schools and classrooms.

2. Using pedagogical strategies that encourage inclusive education within a supportive multilingual learning environment.

3. Being aware of beliefs about speakers of other languages and how they can impact on establishing and maintaining an inclusive learning environment.

4. Assessing individual learners in a manner that takes their linguistic background into account.

5. Giving my learners appropriate opportunities to use their home languages to support and demonstrate their understanding of learning content.

6. Making pedagogical choices that respect and capitalise on my learners' linguistic diversity.

7. Reflecting on how effective my implementation of multilingual approaches is in promoting learning.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS:

The analysis of the focus group transcriptions provided rich insight into the teachers' beliefs. Thus, teachers' beliefs regarding L3 motivation and contextual factors will be reported elsewhere. Following the recommendations for thick description in Davis (1995Davis, K. A. (1995the reporting of the results includes representative examples from the data and a description of the general patterns for each major theme. The findings are summarised and discussed in light of previous theory in the final section of the paper. The studies discussed above were conducted in various countries with different learning contexts and with different constellations of languages taught in schools. Nevertheless, their results are quite similar in many respects: teachers in all countries have positive beliefs about multilingualism and think that multilingualism should be promoted, but they do not often foster multilingualism (i.e. make use of learners' previous linguistic knowledge) in their own classrooms. Teachers do not feel competent at doing so, and many are concerned that it could disrupt further language learning. However, two important aspects of multilingualism were not discussed in any of these studies: teachers' beliefs about the awareness and transfer of previous language learning strategies to enhance multilingualism and their beliefs about cross-curricular collaboration among language teachers.

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