

Multilingualism As A Contemporary Phenomenon; Its Potential for Teachers And Learners

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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 analyzed data collected 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.

Keywords: multilingualism,, learning teachers' beliefs, multilingual pedagogy, language awareness, third-language language learning strategies.

1. Introduction

Multilingualism, which is defined as speaking two or more languages, is a growing worldwide phenomenon. Due to increased mobility and closely linked economies, many countries currently have significant multilingual populations in their workforces and educational systems. The demands of international commerce alone have risen a large amount of interest and attention to multilingual education and training programs. In this time of unprecedented contact among different language groups and cultures, speaking two or more languages can make a difference in where one lives and may determine educational and career choices. English, as a major language of international business, is spoken as a second (L2) or third language (L3) in many countries around the world. In fact, English “can be seen as a factor in the creation of multilingualism today” (Jessner 2006, p.2), and educational programs in English are in high demand. Students who study English as a Foreign Language (EFL) often already speak two or more languages. Speaking more than one language is a necessity for many people worldwide, whether it is because their parents come from different language backgrounds, because their home, regional, national, or school languages are different, or for

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a variety of other reasons. Knowledge of more than one language is a valuable asset when one wants to learn subsequent languages; unfortunately, multilingual students often take the value of their own language knowledge for granted and do not take full advantage of what they already know how to do. Nevertheless, EFL teachers can tap into their students' familiarity with multiple languages to advance learning and accomplish what one EFL student referred to as "bringing one language to another." Engaging in and reflecting on activities that draw on multilingual experience is beneficial to students, their teachers, and to anyone who wants to add a new dimension to language teaching and learning. The goal is to connect the acquisition of English with the students' previous language knowledge and make this multilingual awareness a part of oral discussions, written assignments, and projects in the classroom. Growing numbers of schoolchildren in the European Union have a mother tongue other than the main language of instruction used in school. The proportion varies considerably between EU countries, ranging from 1% in Poland to 40 % in Luxembourg. Migrant children bring a multitude of languages and language skills to the classroom. This is a potential asset to the individual, schools and society at large. Linguistic diversity raises the issue of how schools can make best use of this potential Knowledge of teachers' beliefs is central to understanding their decision-making in the classroom.

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 (Cenoz, 2003, p.33-35) The role of mother tongue literacy in third language learning. (*Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 3(1), p.65–81.) 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, 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 and abilities. Moreover, in the school setting, the language teacher is the key facilitator of learners' multilingualism.

2. The potential of multilingualism for teachers

It is easier to learn new languages because you see connections The more languages you know, the easier it is to learn new languages. The majority of the teachers regard this statement as true when thinking about their own history of language learning. 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, G. (2004 ,p.46). 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, G. 2004,p.76). Clearly, a multilingual pedagogical approach in the classroom requires competent teachers.

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 and be able 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.

3. The potential of multilingualism for learners

They have to be able to take a step back and explore the languages they know. Notably, whereas all teachers consider multilingualism to be an asset to their own language learning, they cannot identify a clear advantage of multilingualism among their students – even among those students for whom French, German or Spanish was their L2 or L3. The teachers consider usually that these learners' achievements are as heterogeneous as those of the other students. Sometimes teachers emphasize that multilingualism as an asset is dependent on learners' awareness of their own knowledge. However, although the teachers believe that multilingualism as an asset depends on the awareness of learners, only a small number of teachers seems to encourage and help their students become aware of and use linguistic resources other than English. In some cases teachers consider that they do not provide such encouragement often because it is difficult to do so when you are not familiar with her students' home languages. The importance of previous strategy knowledge is a must because for example :learning French is completely different from learning English. Teachers' beliefs strongly influence their pedagogical decisions, and such beliefs are typically resistant to change (Borg, S. (2006) p.143). 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, N. (2006),p.78). Because teachers' beliefs are such a strong predictor of what occurs in the classroom, researchers in the field argue that insight into teachers' beliefs it is necessary to understand and improve language teaching and students' learning Aproximately all the teachers are 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. Such contrasting activities typically occur spontaneously and are rarely supported by teaching materials. Furthermore,, the majority of teachers are hesitant to bring other languages into the classroom unless they are familiar with them. The teachers are usually positive about activities that have the potential to promote multilingualism Usually 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. As usual, the teachers are reluctant to refer to other languages when teaching English. Furthermore, teacher education programmes rarely seem to advocate the potential benefits of employing a multilingual pedagogical approach. Whereas all the teachers make frequent linguistic comparisons between L1 and L2 English and encourage the learners to identify similar linguistic patterns, the situation is quite different in reflecting on previous language learning experiences from L2 English and the extent to which these experiences can and should be transferred to the L3 learning context. Besides, teachers list a number of reasons that learning strategies cannot easily be transferred from L2 English to a L3. First, English is learned beginning in the first year of primary school, whereas the L3 is introduced seven years later. Thus, the teachers commonly assume that learners have forgotten how they learned L2 English. Second, the different ages at which students first learn L2 and L3 imply a need for different teaching approaches: Third, teachers sometimes consider that learners are surrounded by English in their daily lives: they are likely to spend several hours every day processing input from English-language popular culture, whereas their exposure to input from the L3 is limited to two hours a week in school in addition to some homework assignments. Although L3 input is also easily available on the Internet, only the most dedicated students take advantage of this resource to enhance their language learning.

4. Results and Conclusions:

As a conclusion, I can affirm that using multilingual approaches involves:

- Recognizing and valuing the multilingual nature of societies, schools and classrooms.
- Using pedagogical strategies that encourage inclusive education within a supportive multilingual learning environment.
- Being aware of beliefs about speakers of other languages and how they can impact on establishing and maintaining an inclusive learning environment.
- Assessing individual learners in a manner that takes their linguistic background into account.
- Giving learners appropriate opportunities to use their home languages to support and demonstrate their understanding of learning content.
- Making pedagogical choices that respect and capitalize on learners' linguistic diversity.
- Reflecting on how effective the implementation of multilingual approaches is in promoting learning.

The use of multilingualism provides rich insight into the teachers' beliefs. Thus, teachers' beliefs regarding L3 motivation and contextual factors. Show that 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.

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