Bilingualism, multilingualism, plurilingualism at home and at school — a practical approach.

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TRANSLATION FORUM: Multilingualism and our Children
Ph.D. Kari Kivinen, 2011
Europe – linguistically a poor continent?

- There are now more than 220 indigenous linguistic varieties in Europe, about 40 of which have the status of official, national or state language.

- So, Europe is very poor on linguistic diversity. If we discount recent immigrants and count only the autochthonous languages, we have only some 3% of the world's spoken languages. (Skuttnab-Kangas, 2000)
Kari, Hämeenlinna, 1961
Monolingualism

• In Europe, linguistic repression is now considered a politically out-dated, costly “solution”, although the use of languages other than national/official may still be penalised or restricted, particularly where there are serious tensions between communities.

• As a result of advances in democracy, imposed monolingualism is now held to be illegitimate and even illegal.

  Council of Europe, 2007
Elsa speaks Finnish at home. She plays with her German and English speaking friends. She hears Lëtzebuergesch, French, Italian and Portuguese at playground. Elsa’s parents speak often English with their quests, whose children speak only Swedish, Danish, Dutch, etc. The TV channels are French, English, German and Lëtzebuergesch. In the shops people speak Lëtzebuergesch, German and French.
Multilingualism

- Multilingualism refers more to social organisation,
- plurilingualism to an individual repertoire of linguistic competence.
- Multilingualism refers to the presence of several languages in a given space, independently of those who use them:
  - (Council of Europe: 2007a:17)
"Our aim is to give the Union a new generation of multilingual citizens" Mr Orban, Commission, 2007

**Lisbon strategic objective 2:**
Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training

Language learning:
- **To enable citizens to communicate in two languages in addition to their mother tongue**, promote language teaching, where relevant, in VET and for adult learners, and provide migrants with opportunities to learn the language of the host country.
• It’s me. And the most important language for me is Danish. I come from Denmark so that’s why Danish is an important language for me. My family speaks Danish and almost all my friends speak Danish.

• Then there are the three other language i speak. They are less than important then Danish for me. But i still talk those language in a normal day, except Norwegian that’s only when i’m with my friend from Norway.

• A part of my family is French so when i see them i talk French to them.
A fundamental principle of the European Schools is the teaching of mother tongue / dominant language as first language (L1). This principle implies the pupil’s enrolment in the section of his/her mother tongue / dominant language where such a section exists.

In schools where the section corresponding to a pupil’s mother tongue / dominant language does not exist, he/she will generally be enrolled in one of the vehicular language sections. He/She will attend the classes in his/her mother tongue / dominant language organised for so-called SWALS (Students Without A Language Section) as L1.
Isabelle, Bruxelles, 1996

- The heart is Spanish (because I feel Spanish)
- The brain is French (but it doesn’t mean that I think in French), I just have to use a lot the French to live in Belgium,...
- The feet are Belgian, because I live in Belgium.
- The hands are English, because English language is important to communicate with people (really often).
Bilingualism

• The term ‘bilingual’ refers to an individual who uses two or more languages or dialects in his or her everyday life, regardless of the context of use. Taking this definition into account, more than half of the world can be considered bilingual (Giussani, Roux, Lubrano, Gaini and Bello, 2007: 1109)

• At an individual level, there is a distinction between a person’s ability in two language and their use of those two languages

• Bilingual typically use their two languages with different people, in different context and for different purposes.

• Balanced bilinguals with equal and strong competence in their two languages are rare

• In terms of ability in two languages, the four basic dimensions are listening, speaking, reading and writing.
Jose, Bruxelles, 1996

- The floor represents the country where I live: Belgium
- The house, it’s Spain, because at home I speak Spanish.
- The tree is France, because outside, in the street and the everyday life I speak French.
- The big building it’s England, because the English language is important to work and communicated with the others.
Plurilingualism

- is the capacity of individuals to use more than one language in social communication whatever their command of those languages. This set of skills constitutes the complex but unique competence, in social communication, to use different languages for different purposes with different levels of command.

  - (Beacco J-C, 2005: 19)
Plurilingual language learner

- The language learner becomes plurilingual and develops interculturality. The linguistic and cultural competences in respect of each language are modified by knowledge of the other and contribute to inter-cultural awareness, skills and know-how. They enable the individual to develop an enriched, more complex personality and an enhanced capacity for further language learning and greater openness to new cultural experiences.

  - (Council of Europe 2007b: 43)
European Language Policy: Plurilingual education

- Plurilingual education will refer to all activities, curricular or extra-curricular of whatever nature, which seek to enhance and develop language competence and speakers’ individual linguistic repertoires, from the earliest schooldays and throughout life.

- The aim of plurilingualism and plurilingual education is not simultaneously teaching a range of languages, teaching through comparing different languages or teaching as many languages as possible. Rather, the goal is to develop plurilingual competence and intercultural education, as a way of living together.

  - Council of Europe, 2007, From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education
Plurilingual education

The purpose of plurilingual education is:

• to make everyone aware of and value the nature of their linguistic and cultural repertoire

• to develop and improve this repertoire

• to give all speakers the means of developing it themselves through autonomous acquisition.
Plurilingualism

• it is a competence that can be acquired
  o plurilingualism cannot be considered the privilege of a “gifted” elite.

• being plurilingual does not mean mastering a large number of languages to a high level,
  o but acquiring the ability to use more than one linguistic variety to degrees for different purposes (conversation, reading or writing, etc.).

• it is regarded as a changing repertoire.
  o The degree of proficiency in the varieties in the repertoire may change over time, as may its composition.

• it is considered a repertoire of communicative resources that speakers use according to their own needs.
  o The linguistic varieties of which it is composed may have different functions: in the family, at work, in official or everyday situations, showing affiliation to a community, etc.
Different types of Schools

- Luxemburgish system (Letz – DE – FR + EN)
- International Schools (EN, L2, + )
- CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) Schools (L1+ pupils learn a subject through the medium of a foreign language)
- Language bath schools (starting 100% with unknown language)
- European School system (L1, L2 and teaching through L2, L3, L4, + )
European School language offer

• All the official languages of the 27 EU member states + Maltese and Gaelic are taught
• Schools have 3-16 language sections
• Students Without Language Section = SWALS
• 3 working languages: English, French, German
  o European Hours 3-5 primary
  o History, Geography, Economics, Art, Music, Sport etc are taught through working language
• L2 starts at 1 primary
• L3 starts at 2 secondary
• L4 starts at 4 secondary
• Complementary course 6-7 (e.g. Ru, Ch)
• + Latin (s3-) and ancient Greek (s4-)
Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

- the purpose of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) is to make the language teaching programmes of Member States transparent and coherent.

- Self-evaluate your own language skills using their self-evaluation tool
The Role of the parents

• Language planning
  o which languages to speak at home
  o which languages chosen outside of school (day care, Au pair, nursery school, travels, relatives, friends)

• Language use
  o In the bilingual family, the both parents should speak systematically their languages for their children
  o The expatriate families should support actively the language development of their children by all the possible measures (magazines, books, films, computer games, etc)

• Language choices in school
  o Choice of the main teaching language
  o Choices for the second, third and fourth language

• Language support
  o Interest, follow-up, and support when needed
  o Crises management
Language learning problems

High expectations should be avoided
- Language learning is a slow process.
- Individuals are learning languages in their own pace.
- Sometimes bilingual pupils are slower in the first phases of language learning.

Learning difficulties are difficult to detect
- Dyslexia, dysphasia, and other language deficits are detected normally relatively late, at the age of 6-8.

Refuse
- Language learning is often linked to the identity. Sometimes children do not want to learn a language for specific reasons.

Semilingualism
SEMILINGUALISM

- Semilingualism in terms of deficiencies in bilinguals when compared with monolinguals on the following: display a small vocabulary and incorrect grammar, consciously think about the language production, stilted and uncreative with each language and finds it difficult to think and express emotions in either language.

  Skuttnabb-Kangas 2000
Some conclusions

• It is difficult to overestimate the role of the mother tongue/dominant language in the language development
• It is better that the child is able to express his/her feelings in one language than that s/he is unsure to use any language
• There is a link between knowledge of languages and enhanced cognitive ability
Study on the Contribution of Multilingualism to Creativity (2009)

• a greater potential for creativity amongst those who know more than one language, when compared with monolinguals.
• bilinguals has centred on being able to see the world through different lenses.
• studies reveal that bilinguals tend to be better in problem-solving which is cognitively demanding.
• Language awareness gives the potential for enriched information processing.
• It is reported that knowing more than one language may help the brain sharpen its ability to focus.
• Language awareness gives the potential for enriched information processing.
• Multilingualism is reported as helping to nurture interpersonal communication awareness and skills.
• interface between multilingualism and age-related mental diminishment.
• speaking more than one language may have cognitive benefits that extend from childhood into old age
References

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