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Abstract : *In this paper, I will introduce the DVD "comparing our languages, an approach to teaching/learning of French for children newly arrived in France" (Auger, 2005a). We will see that it could be used in any multilingual class. This DVD is a training tool intended for teachers, trainers, instructors and students who work with non French-speaking people, needing French as a foreign language. The DVD is edited by the Scéren (network for pedagogical books and documents in France). First of all, I would like to explain why I felt the need to create such a DVD and then what are the effects of such a document on pupils and teachers.*

Key words : *Multilingualism/plurilingualisme, Comparing languages, Pupils newly arrived, Metalanguage, Metalinguistics*

Résumé : *Dans cet article, je souhaiterais présenter le DVD "comparons nos langues, une approche de l'enseignement-apprentissage du français aux enfants nouvellement arrivés en France" (Auger 2005a). Nous verrons que ce DVD peut être utilisé dans n'importe quelle classe multilingue. Le DVD est un outil de pratique pour les enseignants, les formateurs et les étudiants qui travaillent avec des publics non-francophones dont le français est langue étrangère.*

Mots-clés : *Multilinguisme/plurilinguisme, Comparaison de langues, Enfants nouvellement arrivés, Métalangage, Métalinguistique*

1. Reasons for such a DVD

The result of a study on learning/teaching French in classes for children newly arrived in France.

The aim of this research was to observe, thanks to an ethnographic methodology, what was going on in classes, and more specifically, what kind of multilingualism was elaborated in regular classes or in special classes for immigrant.

This study started 7 years ago in the south of France (Gard et Hérault) in primary and secondary schools, as well as in what we call "plateforme d'accueil" that is special 6 week sessions for children newly arrived in France.
The aim of the study was to observe what kind of multilinguism (if any) the children could develop, how intercultural communication is treated in class and what is done to help the learning of French language and cultures.

The results come mainly from interviews with school personnel (teachers, directors etc.), pupils and parents. These results reinforce Varro's and Lorcerie's conclusions (2003). To sum up briefly, bilingualism is seen as negative, especially when it concerns immigrant children living in difficult social conditions.
At the same time, French language is seen as "technical" (that is to say a sum of rules) by teachers. A report from the ministry of education 2002 explains that "there is a risk for children who are not in the group of social inheritors (which is the case for newly arrived children) to misunderstand why they are taught what they are taught". The lack of information regarding intercultural communication also provokes numerous misunderstandings. These misunderstandings (regarding the way to move, speak etc) reinforce stereotypes of children, their language, country, cultures (Auger, 2005b).

The researcher posture

I take what can be called a *sociolinguistics for change* posture. Sociolinguistics for change refers to reflexivity, in theory and in practice, regarding to the researcher's responsibility. This reflexivity participates in the practice of social change. The theoretical framework is critical sociolinguistics (Heller, 2002). "The starting point is interactional sociolinguistics" but the aim is also to connect the practice to historical moments, taking in account social dynamics, in time and space, inclusion and exclusion". Regarding sociolinguistics for change, the researcher is socially situated; he is responsible for his study and research site. Change in this context is seen as transformation or evolution rather than substitution of representations or practices.
Our engagement is visible through the creation of documents (Dalley, 2004, Roy, 2005) and collaboration with the field.

Principles for the DVD

The change concerns the way pupil bilingualism is seen.
Showing how languages systems function within the class can help avoid misunderstandings between pupils and teachers and between pupils. They realize that each idiom has universal categories (syntax, phonetic, lexicon, etc.) but specific actualizations (special prosody for questions, anger etc. in this or that language). It is the same for each theme that concerns human beings (health, work, food etc), each culture, and within cultures, different groups and individuals, with their own story has a special relationship to life that is present in some ways through language.

To change the way pupils are considered, the aim is to take advantage of one's resources. Taking into account the pupils former experiences releases the

teachers and changes his representation of a "wild child" because he has not gone to school before. Teachers stop focusing deficits.

The DVD is a 23-minute documentary of classroom situations and comments. The activities consist of comparing the different languages and cultural communicational habits that co-exist in class. The pupils use languages they know (mother tongues or others) as supports for the learning of a new language. It makes them more active in the learning process, reinforces their ability to observation: analyses, making links between languages. The DVD exposes different situations in class where children work at different linguistic levels, for example: syntax, ways to write, consonants and vowels, lexicon, gender and number, gestures, phonetics. Other activities were created following the same idea in the pedagogical guide (relationship to space and time, social representations, relationship between phones and graphs…).

Pupils: expert on their language

In French for specific purposes classes, students have knowledge and competencies (for instance their work) that teacher does not know. The teacher's role is to help students organise their knowledge. Learners are seen as knowledgeable.
Using such an approach with newly arrived children would not disadvantage those who have never gone to school before. If the teacher asks a reflexive question when he wants to explain something about French the child can contribute because he knows language. For exemple: "what is going on in this case in the language you know, when is it similar, different (within the language or compared to the new language) etc".

2. Retroaction after teachers having seen the DVD

One thing is to propose activities; their integration into practice is another. I would now like to focus on what the teachers say after having seen the DVD. It is more important than focusing on pupils because many studies (Candelier, 2003, Perregaux and ali., 2003) have shown positive effects on pupils. Here, the aim is to understand how teachers deal with this approach because if teachers do not use it, students cannot learn from it.

Difficulty with the notion of "norm"

One of the most frequent reactions has to do with pupils' mother tongues. Most of the time, teachers do not know these languages. The media has already given a representation of the various communities (Arabic, English, Portuguese…) and their legitimacy on the language market (Bourdieu). For instance:

They speak different forms of gypsy languages so how can children start from them.

Teachers often do not know that variation is the norm, whatever the language is. Every communicative level varies (lexicon, syntax, distance between the

speakers...), even when we write. The problem is that school teaches a form of norm, a homogenoeus language, but, sociolinguistically, it is a variation like any other (see Labov, Goffman). The norm is socially constructed, even if it seems natural. Frances ideology of monolingualism reinforces what we have just described (Cerquiglini, 2003).

The teachers are also frightened that children compare with dialectal forms.
Pupils can produce mistakes in their mother tongue /// we cannot validate or take it for granted to help them learn French.
I will answer that the aim is to realize variation exists and how we can pass from one variety to another. But we must admit and inform the teachers that these variations are more or less recognized by school or different communities. The elite judges different forms as poor or rich. But linguistically, the aim is to observe how languages function and can be learned. In this way, the teacher is closer to his pupils, avoiding judgment on mother tongues or French and cautioning children on the representations that can affect languages.

If the teacher does not know pupils idioms?

Teachers comment very often on the fact thy do not know how to speak their pupils' language and it seems to them this is a handicap to comparing languages in the classroom.
I do not know Arabic nor Russian so how could I help pupils go from one language to French.
Comparing languages does not require knowledge of the pupils' language rather; it requires knowing how a language functions, with its different levels. Another teacher comments:

> *It is said that we can notice what are the specificities in pupils languages but how could I know that if I do not know how to speak their language.*

Thanks to his own system, teachers can discover those of her pupils. It is easy to conclude gender does not exist in English or *to be* in generic sentences in Arabic or that the negative form can be put in various places in a sentence when the children repeat the same error each time they try to speak or write in French. This type of approach is a way to be less linguistically centred and is typical of intercultural activities. Finally, the lack of knowledge regarding other languages pushes towards a meeting of the other. In this way, teachers could encourage discussions with and between pupils speaking the same language or different languages.

Interlinguistics distance

Most of the time, teachers are discouraged by the distance existing between French and non-European or non indo-European languages. But languages always have some similarities. Think only of the possibility to compare words. For example, Chinese and English seem to be very far from each other and it is true regarding lexicon. English is closer to German. But, if we consider syntax, English is closer to Chinese than to German (90% of regularity between English

and Chinese versus 30% with German). One should not be confused by false linguistics representations. During one of our feedback interview a teacher says:

Arabic language has got only three vowels so the pronunciation is difficult in French for these children.

We tend to focus on the difficulty linked to the interlinguistic distance without considering what is common to the different systems and has already been integrated by pupils. For instance, an Arabic child speaker will not have any difficulty with French consonants (they are more numerous than in French) but who will notice that ?

The belief that writing is the exact transcription of speaking

Other remarks have to do with writing. Some teachers are shocked that we could sometimes write in French what we could more or less hear in an other language: *writing in Arabic or in Russian in our alphabet is a bit false isn't it ?*

I will not emphasize on writing that is still considered sacred, superior to oral form, and the main way of evaluating children. On the whole, the belief is that writing is the exact transcription of speaking although we know that only the international phonetic alphabet (IPA) can transcribe exactly. Teaching IPA is long and not compulsory in this case. But transcribing in French what can be heard in other languages can be interesting in the sense it can help pupils visualise similarities and differences and give more opportunities to reflect on language.

Confusions between metalinguistic and metalingual activities

Sometimes, after having seen the DVD, some teachers would say: *what about children who have never been to school before they only know oral language so what can they say about it.*
We should not mix metalinguistics and metalingual activities here. As soon as one speaks he can think of his way of speaking. It is a metalingual activity not a metalinguistic one, that is the use of special lexicon to describe language (for instance: verbs etc).
Sometimes, teachers have difficulty creating such activities and ask for help because they know metalinguitics very well but not necessarily metalingual activities. We can help them by saying that they can develop them when they hear a frequent difficulty among pupils or when they want to teach grammar.

Representations on bilinguality

Most of the time, the languages of bilinguals (multilinguals) are seen as pipes that do not communicate, that is languages which are completely independent form one another (Heller, 1996, Gajo, 2001). The Common European framework describing the competencies of a multilingual person, encourages intercomprehension, and recognizes unbalanced but developing competencies within different competences.

Conclusion

Posture for teachers

Teachers for newly arrived children still have difficulty using approaches such as that suggested in this DVD. The ideology regarding the norm and bilinguality is still important. We must also underline that some teachers are monolingual though coming from the first immigration wave. Their own parents did not transmit their language: Italian, Spanish... At that time, the success of integration was monolinguality and speaking various languages seemed dangerous. But now, scientific evolution could change that stereotype. We now know that various languages can help develop other abilities (conceptualisation, mathematics...). This approach is non dogmatic, it is more a posture to adopt when a mistake (recurrent mistake) occurs, or when a new point of grammar seems delicate for pupils.

This approach does not transform the teacher into linguist but asks only for more attention.
The teachers in the DVD are not trained to use this approach. I have only spoken with them, explained the approach and proposed various linguistic levels they could choose to elaborate their course. But I understand it can be frightening for the teacher to recognize pupils have some abilities they themselves do not have. It can give the impression that they do not master their class, that pupils could make mistakes they could not correct... this posture is a risk.
But is it not more risky for student learning to refuse such a posture ? Ignoring some pupils' abilities regarding their origin could be difficult for their identity.

Training teachers as a solution

Reflection is the best way to overcome stereotypes, to analyse one's own practice in class. That is why it was interesting to question the teachers to understand why they can be put in difficulty by such an approach. For the sociolinguist, the didactics specialist, it is interesting to notice that elements he considers as obvious are not present in classrooms. Only the diffusion of knowledge could make representations and practices change.

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