

Teaching how to build bridges between languages

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Abstract

The article presents examples of activities and tasks used during classes devoted to plurilingual education at the Centre for Foreign Language Teacher Training and European Education of the University of Warsaw. In the first part of the paper, the context in which future teachers of languages are educated at the Centre is described. The description focuses on the Plurilingual and Pluricultural Education course and the Integrated Language Didactics course, which enable students to become acquainted with the pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures and to further develop their plurilingual and pluricultural competence. These courses are an integral part of the programme of study at the Centre and it is assumed that the students will use the knowledge and skills acquired while attending them in their future work at school in order to facilitate the teaching and learning of languages. The second part of the paper is devoted to activities and tasks presented during the 10th International Conference of the EDiLiC Association. They include an awakening to languages activity, conducted as part of the Plurilingual and Pluricultural Education course at the Centre, and tasks used during the Integrated Language Didactics course for pre-service teachers of English and German or English and French.

Keywords: *Teacher education, pluralistic approaches, linguistic diversity, Integrated Language Didactics, classroom activities and tasks*

1. Introduction

Plurilingual education and pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures, described in Candelier et al. (2012) among others, have been an integral part of the programme of study at the Centre for Foreign Language Teacher Training and European Education of the University of Warsaw for a number of years. This article discusses some examples of activities and tasks employed on the courses of Plurilingual and Pluricultural Education and Integrated Language Didactics, which were also presented at the 10th International Conference of the EDiLiC Association in 2023.

2. A few words about the Centre

The main goal of the Centre is to educate pre-service teachers of foreign languages such as English, French and German, and of civic studies. The Centre offers BA and MA studies as well as postgraduate courses.

The first courses on the awakening to languages approach were introduced into the programme of study in 2001 as a result of the Centre's involvement in the ECML project JALING, "Janua Linguarum: L'introduction de l'éveil aux langues dans le curriculum". Since 2012 all undergraduate students have attended the Plurilingual and Pluricultural Education course. In 2020 the Integrated Language Didactics course was introduced for MA students who have chosen teaching English and French or German as their main fields of study. Since 2021 BA and MA seminars on plurilingual and pluricultural education have been conducted.

The above-mentioned courses aim to familiarize students with the pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures and to help each of them develop their plurilingual and pluricultural competence, as defined in the *CEFR* and in the Companion Volume to the *CEFR* (Council of Europe, 2001; Council of Europe, 2020; Moore et al., 2020; Piccardo & North, 2020).

2.1 The Plurilingual and Pluricultural Education course

The course "Plurilingual and Pluricultural Education" is obligatory for all undergraduate students. It lasts 3 semesters. Students are awarded 4 ECTS credits on course completion: 1.5 for their work in each of the first two semesters and 1 in the third semester. During each semester there are 15 one and a half hour face-to-face teaching sessions. The verification of the learning outcomes consists in assessing students' project work and presentations. In the first semester the projects focus on the education and linguistic policies of chosen countries, in the second semester they involve intercultural interviews with foreigners living in Poland, and in the third semester students prepare group projects on the linguistic and cultural diversity in Poland.

In the third semester students become familiar with resources related to pluralistic approaches, among which is the ECML website, through activities such as the European Day of Languages activity presented below.

2.2 The Integrated Language Didactics course

The course enables students to become acquainted with the Integrated Didactic Approach to Languages (IDAL) and its principles. It lasts one semester. It is a blended course, with seven one and a half hour face-to-face teaching sessions and eight asynchronous classes on the Moodle platform. The students are awarded 2 ECTS credits on completion of the course.

As far as the verification of the learning outcomes is concerned, students' knowledge is assessed through an online test at the end of the course. Their skills related to applying the assumptions of IDAL in the classroom are assessed on the basis of tasks for teaching tertiary languages (German and French) in secondary schools which are designed by students in project groups and presented during the last teaching session in the semester. In addition, there is continuous assessment of students' work on the platform, which consists of quizzes and posts in discussion forums.

Throughout the course students take part in activities and do tasks which encourage them to notice and

reflect on similarities and differences between the chosen Indo-European languages, in particular Polish, English, French and German. Two examples of such activities, namely tasks devoted to cognates in German, English and Polish and a task on French, Polish and English grammar, are described below.

3. Examples of plurilingual tasks and activities

The tasks and activities described below include an awakening to languages activity which has been conducted as part of the Plurilingual and Pluricultural Education course at the Centre and two examples of tasks employed during Integrated Language Didactics classes. All three were presented during a workshop at the 10th International Conference of the EDiLiC Association.

3.1 Example 1: European Day of Languages

This is an awakening to languages activity. Its objectives are as follows: students become acquainted with a useful website in order to use its resources for promoting pluralistic approaches, they deepen their awareness of linguistic diversity and share their knowledge of different languages with other students.

3.1.1 Description of the activity

Students prepare for the classroom activity beforehand, at home. They go to ECML's webpage, European Day of Languages, available at <https://edl.ecml.at/Home/tabid/1455/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>, where they choose one language they know well from among the languages listed at the bottom of the webpage (ECML, n.d.). They copy the title and the last sentence from the webpage in their chosen language onto a sheet of paper which they later bring into class. The English version of the title is "Celebrate the European Day of Languages with us!" and the last sentence is "At the Council of Europe's initiative, the European Day of Languages has been celebrated every year since 2001 on 26 September - together with the European Commission."

One full teaching session is devoted to the activity. In class, students work in small groups. Their task is to read the title and the sentence in the language they chose beforehand to the other members of the group and to say a few words about that language and how it functions in terms of grammar, spelling, etc. The sheets of paper with the text in the different languages are later pinned onto a board at the front of the class.

The activity has been conducted several times, and each time students took an active part in it and claimed they enjoyed it and were proud to share their knowledge of their chosen language with the other members of their group.

As a follow-up to the activity described above, students can be asked to do the following task: They are given the title of the webpage and the last sentence in a language they do not know. Their task is to try and identify the language and find the equivalents of the following phrases in the text: "the Council of Europe's," "the Day of Languages," and "the European Commission." The objective of the task is for students to learn to understand the gist of a text in an unfamiliar language through finding keywords.

3.2 Example 2: Cognates in German and in English

This sequence of tasks was designed in accordance with the assumptions of the Integrated Didactic Approach. This approach emphasizes learners' active role in the learning process. As a rule, students discover and reflect on similarities and differences between languages in a series of inductive tasks and, with the help of the teacher, if necessary, arrive at the rules which govern those languages in terms of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation (Neuner, 2004; Wypusz, 2015).

The sequence of tasks shown in this example has the following objectives: students deepen their knowledge of the kinship relations between Indo-European languages, and between Germanic languages in particular, they discover how learning new words in an additional language can be facilitated by pointing out similarities between the vocabulary of related languages and they learn some cognates in German, English and their home languages.

The sequence of tasks takes about half of a teaching session. The students do not have to prepare anything at home.

3.2.1 Description of the tasks

Task 1: Students watch a fragment (2.07-2.43) of the film "The Story of English" on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UG6vHXArk> (Armstrong, 2009). Alternatively, the teacher may choose to tell them the story of how Sir William Jones discovered the connections between the languages within the Indo-European family (McCrum et al., 2001). The students are asked to find answers to the following questions while watching the film or listening to the story:

- 1) What did Jones discover in a Hindu temple in India?
- 2) What conclusions did he draw from the existence of words such as "seven," "sapta," "hepta," and "septem"?

Having discussed the answers to the two questions, students move on to Task 2.

Task 2: The teacher presents the definition of cognates: "words that have been inherited in direct descent from an etymological ancestor in a common parent language" ("Cognate," 2023). Students work in small groups or pairs. They are given a list of German words: (das) Wasser, (der) Bruder, (der) Sohn, (die) Mutter, (die) Schule, (das) Tier, (das) Blut, (der) Finger, (die) Nacht, (das) Buch, neu, blau, lernen, trinken, sterben. Their task is to find English cognates of the German words. Then the students decide whether the German and English words from the first part of the task have cognates in their mother tongue or another language they know. They can use a dictionary such as the WordSense Online Dictionary to check whether they are true cognates. At the end there is a whole-class discussion with feedback from different groups.

Task 3: The teacher asks the students why it was not so easy for them to find English cognates for the words "sterben" and "Tier." She then explains that the English word "deer" is derived from the Old English word "dēor," which used to mean "animal" or "wild animal." The meaning of the word was later narrowed to denote a particular type of wild animal (Millward, 1988). "Deer" is a cognate of the German "Tier", Dutch "dier" and Swedish "djur," all three of which mean "animal, beast". They are all derived from Proto-Germanic *deuzą ("animal") ("deer," 2023). The same type of change, narrowing of meaning, affected the ancestor of the word "starve," which is a cognate of the German "sterben" and Dutch "sterven," both of which mean "to die" ("starve," 2023). The students are then asked to reflect on another set of cognates, namely Polish "dwa," Italian "due," French "deux," English "two" and German

“zwei,” which are all cognates derived from Proto-Indo-European *dwóh₁ (“two,” 2023). The teacher guides the students towards the conclusion that the reason why it is not always easy to recognize cognates is because languages evolve and the meaning and pronunciation of words can change (Trask, 2010).

In their comments on the sequence of tasks described above, students have said that doing the tasks made them more aware of the similarities between the languages they already know and the “new” language. They also reported later that drawing their learners’ attention to such similarities helped the learners to acquire the vocabulary in the new language more efficiently, in accordance with research findings, namely that in order for new items to be stored in long-term memory, they should be “integrated and anchored in the existing knowledge inventory” (Neuner, 2004, p. 16).

3.3 Example 3: French and English conditional and time clauses

The objectives of this Integrated Didactic task are as follows: students deepen their knowledge of the structures used in French and English subordinate clauses, they become aware of the similarities and differences between grammatical structures in French, English and their home language(s) and discover how this knowledge can be used to help learn the grammar of L3 and consolidate the knowledge of the grammar of L2. The task takes about one third of a teaching session. This includes the follow-up activity described below.

3.3.1 Description of the task

Students are asked to work in pairs and translate the following two French sentences into English first and then into their home language(s):

- 1) “Je le lui donnerai quand je le verrai.” *I will give it to him when I see him.* (Bourlier et al., 2004, p. 187)
- 2) “Je le lui donnerai si je le vois.” *I will give it to him if I see him.* (adapted from Bourlier et al., 2004)

The students are asked to reflect on the tenses used in the subordinate clauses in the three languages and to formulate rules on the use of tenses in French, where the future tense is employed in time clauses and the present tense in conditional clauses (Poisson-Quinton, 2007), then in English, in which the present tense is used in both time and conditional clauses, and finally in their mother tongue, which in the case of most students of the Centre is Polish, where the future tense appears in both types of subordinate clause.

The students are then asked to create more examples of sentences with time and conditional clauses in French and in English, paying special attention to the tense used in the subordinate clause. As a follow-up the students are asked to design a communicative task for their prospective learners in secondary schools which can be used to practise the structures either in the time or in the conditional clauses in French. The teacher provides them with a model situation for each structure.

After doing the task students usually comment on how useful it is to compare grammatical structures in the languages from their linguistic repertoires. They claim that it not only helps them to learn structures in the “new” language, but also to revise the structures in the L2, in this case the use of the present tense in both time and conditional clauses in English, which can cause problems at the production stage for Polish learners of English, even at an advanced level.

4. Conclusion

The overall aim of activities and tasks such as the ones described above is to help pre-service teachers understand how particular languages function and notice connections between languages. This should make it possible for them to become skilled and knowledgeable architects who will be able to help their future pupils to learn how to build bridges between different languages.

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