Conference at the University of Iceland on multilingualism, family language policies, school language policies and multilingual teaching methods on September 21st, 2023

Engaging in conversations on multilingualism via work on Critical Multilingual Language Awareness in a preparatory class in Sweden: Scenarios of possibility

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The outline of the talk

- Aim of the pilot study and a background

- The design of the thematic unit

- Some examples of conversations on multilingualism

- Conclusions

Aim of the pilot study

– to design and explore a thematic unit on multilingualism among recently arrived students

- based in a (critical) multilingual language awareness approach,
- as new educational experiences, and scenarios of possibility (Heath 2000)

– A focus on co-learning processes

» Reflection-in-action (experimentation with the situation at-hand)

» Reflection-on-action (analyses after the fact, McCaw 2021)

A (Critical) Multilingual Language Awareness approach…

…strives to develop students' "consciousness of language as social practice and a voicing of their own multilingual experiences" (García 2017, 268–269), to…

- – give multilingual practices value and legitimacy in schools
- – challenge discourses of deficiency regarding minoritized language speakers
- – provide new educational experiences (Hélot et al. 2018, 10; see also Cummins 2012)

Some studies on Language Awareness: Sierens et al. 2018; Frijns et al., 2018; Rosiers, 2017; Mary et al., 2021; Young et al., 2021 (Europe); Prasad & Lory 2020 (USA)

Five dimensions of Language Awareness

1. *Cognitive:* "how languages work and how we learn them"

2. *Affective:* "feelings associated with languages, language learning and language users"

3. *Social*: "linguistic and cultural identities", "building relationships with diverse language users"

4. *Performance*: flexible language use/ translingual practices

5. *Power*: "critical reflection about power relations associated with languages, language learners and language users"

   (Prasad & Lory 2020, 809, see James & Garrett 1992)

The language ecology and policy of Sweden

c. 150-200 spoken languages

Swedish is the principal language

The right to develop and use languages other than Swedish

(Swedish Language Act 2009)

>25% of students in school speak a language/'Mother Tongue' other than Swedish

20% of teachers in schools have a foreign background

Five recognized minority languages
(Finnish, Jiddish, Meänkieli, Sámi, Romani Chib, see Council of Europe)

Language Education research in Sweden

- Teachers find it difficult to draw on students' multilingual language resources in mainstream classes (e.g. Engblom et al. 2018; Hedman & Magnusson, 2022; Lupsa 2022; Rehman & Juvonen 2022; SOU 2019; Wedin 2021)

- Minority language speaking teachers may be reluctant to use their own language resources (Snoder et al. 2021)

- Teachers want to collaborate with mother tongue teachers and multilingual study mentors (Lupsa 2022; SOU 2019)

A reductionist view on multilingualism

– Using 'multilingualism as a resource' is mainly viewed as a strategy for Swedish language learning (Lupsa 2022),

– leaving little space for multilingualism as

- social practice
- lived experience, and
- a means of sharing knowledge (see Heugh 2021)

Designing a thematic unit involving conversations about multilingualism

- Collaboration with the MEITS – Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals Transforming Societies project, University of Cambridge *(Cambridge-Stockholm Collaborative Research Grants Scheme)*

- Adapted teaching material on language awareness *We Are Multilingual* from the MEITS (Fisher et al. 2020)
  - Language teachers adapted the material to the Swedish context and a Preparatory Class

Why designing this thematic unit in a Preparatory Class?

- Many different introductory settings and programs for migrant students in Sweden and elsewhere

    - *A transitional space:* migrant students prepare for mainstream schooling in the language of instruction
    - Students' multilingual repertoires may be more visible
        - but may still be associated with problems and viewed as a transitional phenomenon only (e.g. Nilsson & Axelsson 2013)

    - How can we reinforce (critical) multilingual language awareness either before or just as the migrant students enter mainstream classes?

Participants and research material

- 10 students ages 13–15 years, from countries in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, South and Central America and North and Northeast Africa
  - Schooling in Sweden ranged from 3–6 months

- Two teachers in Swedish as a second language and another subject teacher
- Six Multilingual Study Mentors – engaged in most of the lessons

Produced material

  - Video-recordings in whole class
  - Audio-recordings of group work and interviews with students, teachers and Multilingual Study Mentors
  - Fieldnotes, photos of student-produced material

The thematic unit:

>10 lessons over two months and follow-up preparations for an exhibition the following term

– *Conversations about multilingualism*

- Students' and teachers' own experiences
- Students' ways of knowing
- Literature, poetry
- TV episodes from an educational broadcasting company
- Student explorations

Examples of themes

- To be multilingual together
- Multilingualism as pleasure and hardship
- Metalinguistic awareness
- Interpretation and translation
- Language variation
- Exploring multilingualism beyond the Preparatory Class

Ways of teaching

- Teacher introduces topics in the whole class with visual/multimodal support
- Group discussions (with Multilingual Study Mentors)
- The teacher pickes up students' contributions in class
- The writing of a joint class text
- Individual work and/or group work

Being multilingual together: *What is a multilingual family?*

Teacher: Emin, är din familj flerspråkig? <***Emin, is your family multilingual?***>

Emin: nej, bara en ***<no, just one>***

Teacher: bara ett språk? ***<just one language?>***

Emin: ja talar [ett turkiskt språk] ***<yes speaks [a Turkic language]>***

Teacher: *[…] mamma kan inga andra språk?* ***<mom knows no other languages?>***

Emin: hon kan ryska ***<she can [speak] Russian>***

Teacher: och**?** ***<and?>***

Emin: ja ryska bara ***<yes only Russian>***

Teacher: nähä hon kan turkiska också ***<no no she can [speak] Turkish too>***

Emin: ja ***<yes>***

Teacher: och lite engelska ***<and some English>***

Emin: ja ***<yes>***

Teacher: och lite svenska ***<and some Swedish?>***

Emin: nej ***<no> [smiles]***

Teacher: jo hon kan lite svenska i alla fall jag har pratat lite svenska med henne /../ men din familj är inte flerspråkig**? <yes she *knows some Swedish anyway, I've talked with her in Swedish …/ but your family isn't multilingual?***

Emin: nej ***<no>***   (Hedman & Fisher 2022a, 7)

Language-learning experiences as shared hardship (based on a poem My new language, Cerú 1993)

- **Jennie:** When I read the poem, it feels like it was me because it can sometimes be very difficult to communicate with people when speaking another language, everything in the beginning when we learn a new language can /… / be difficult /… / some people tend to be cruel and think that others don't know anything when they can't speak, but it's the opposite.

- **Adriana:** *I think about when I could not speak Swedish and I had many feelings. In my previous school, [they] thought I was stupid and they did not take me into account because I did not speak Swedish.*

(Hedman & Fisher 2022a, 12)

Student explorations of multilingualism beyond the classroom

Amanda: Mustafa, you had an example that you thought was interesting

Mustafa: I think it was interesting that many teachers want to learn Turkish

Amanda: were you surprised?

Mustafa: yes

            /…/

Amanda: Nasser, do you have anything else?

Nasser: that some teachers understand Arabic

(Hedman & Fisher 2022a, 13)

Multilingualism as pleasure:
creative translingual practices

Jennie: nosotros entonces hemos mezclado con mi mama nos hemos inventado una palabra que dice fuktor ***<then we have mixed with my mother we have invented a word that says fuktor>*** /…/

Multilingual mentor: y ese cuál es? **<and that is?>**

Jennie: aa det [det=Swedish for "it"] dice förstår *<ahh it means understand>*

Multilingual mentor: aa förstår *<aa understand>*

[everybody laughs]

/…/

Multilingual mentor: por lo menos yo digo muchas palabras eee *te sakno* digo yo a mis lo de hago en spañol y esa la uso yo mucho *<I at least say many words e:: te sakno I say to mine I do it a lot in Spanish and I use it a lot>* y cuando quiero (unaudible) echo de menos y mi nieta pone *te sakno* och när jag vill *jag saknar dig* ***and when I want (inaudible) echo de menos and my grandson writes te sakno and when I want jag saknar dig***

Adriana: a::: (Hedman & Fisher, 2022b, 7– 8)

Collaborative work on metalinguistic awareness

MM: *[turns to Emin in a Turkic language]* **<for example, in Kurdish, there is one word, they say the word "le" instead of "in" and "on" did you understand how?>** *[…]*

Emin: *[turns to Mustafa who speaks both some Kurdish and Turkish and asks in Turkish]* Mustafa, sen de mi öyle şey yapıyorsun? **<Mustafa, do you do like that too?>** */…/* **<do you also say le?>**

MM: *[in a Turkic language]* **it's the same as in Turkish>** */../*

Emin: *[asks Mustafa in Turkish]* kürtce? **<in Kurdish?>**

Mustafa: *[in Turkish]* yok, o benim anladığım kürtce değil **<no, this Kurdish I don't understand>**

(Hedman & Fisher 2022a, 8)

The expanded role of the Multilingual Study Mentors: asserting epistemic authority

MM=Multilingual Mentor

- فتقول، يعني، هاي المشاكل موجودة **في**
- السويد أيضاً مثل ما موجودة في بلدان
- أخرى
- **MM:** *so she says **I mean** these problems exist in Sweden just like it does in other countries*

  •
- وبال.. انتو بالسوريا ممنوع الواحد يقول
- أنا كردي، يقرا شو اسمو..
- **MM:** *and in the (.) you in Syria one is forbidden to say I'm Kurdish*
- /…/
- أي من الأول، يقرا باللغة الكردية، ما
- تقرون باللغة الكردية.
- **MM:** *yes from the beginning to study in the Kurdish language you don't study in the Kurdish language*

(Hedman & Fisher 2022b 8– 9)

Building on a discussion of the previously forbidden Sámi languages In Sweden

The MSM refers to knowledge about Kurdish and Arabic in Syria on a time-scale

Summary

– The role of the MSMs was not restricted to the scaffolding of 'accurate', 'effective' and 'appropriate' communication (Kramsch & Whiteside 2008, 664), but

– entailed a widened epistemic authority and involvement based on their knowledge and experiences

– contributed added value to the conversations –
  • rendering *students* capable based on their linguistic knowledge (see Bozalek & Zembylas 2017)

Conclusions

This pilot study indicates scenarios of possibility, via co-learning:

–   how students and teachers/mentors can learn from each other – cultivate practices of curiosity (Bozalek & Zembylas 2017) and new ways of listening (McDermott 1988)

–   How participants claim knowledge and experience in new ways, and become involved

–   Potentially spurring *a linguistics of participation* (Mc Dermott 1988)

Student and teacher reflections

Students wished to know more about
languages at the school and in the world

In teachers' reflections on action (McCaw 2021), the teachers wished to continue to work with these dimensions, and to

- include more literature and poetry
- use multilingual teachers more as role models
- bring in (more/other) critical perspectives,
    - e.g. by involving parents/caregivers and other
    community members
- work with this theme in mainstream classes

Acknowledgements

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