



MULTILINGUAL PEDAGOGY

Much recent sociolinguistic research lately has focused on the fluid way people use language in the context of increased mobility, complex migration and the linguistic diversity of many parts of the world. Previously linguists had focused on whole, named languages (eg. French, German, English) that people spoke at different levels. These levels were conceived in a hierarchy from 'beginner' level to 'native speaker'. Bilingualism was often conceived of as parallel monolingualisms, where people were not really recognised as being properly bilingual unless they spoke two languages to an equal 'native speaker' level. This model dominated second language teaching and led to the orthodoxy where teachers ban languages except the target language. There is little or no evidence that this approach helps people to learn new languages (see Elsa Auerbach, *Reexamining English Only in the Classroom*, 1993). However, whatever your view, it's important that teachers and volunteers are on the same page here and sending the same messages to students as to whether the classroom is a multilingual or monolingual space.

An alternative to this rigid, bordered, monolingual concept of language is to consider that everyone has a fluid and evolving range of language resources (our 'linguistic repertoires') that relate to our social, economic and geographic contexts - to our biographies, in other words. For example, a person who is born in Algeria to Berber speaking parents, studies business at University and then ends up in London via Belgium will most likely have acquired of language skills and knowledge that dip in and out of named languages. She will speak conversational Berber, but may be more confident in familial contexts than work contexts. She will read standard Arabic and understand most varieties of Arabic with varying degrees of difficulty but she will be most comfortable speaking Algerian Arabic. She will operate fluently in written and spoken French, especially academic and business discourses, communicate with increasing effectiveness in English across a variety of discourses and understand a smattering of Flemish, especially reading it, from her time in Belgium. In a super-diverse local community in London, for example, someone might use the full range of their repertoires on any given day.

What does this mean for teaching and learning? First of all, taking a more multilingual approach means trying to understand and validate the students' existing language resources. Students are not treated as 'deficient' in the target language but a skillful linguistics with a range of linguistic resources to build on. This makes learners feel more confident

and respected. When people feel good about themselves as learners they are more likely to learn well. Asking students how they say a word or phrase in other languages, for example, helps them to connect new knowledge to existing knowledge. Allowing students who share languages to use their expert language(s) in order to analyse the target language and help one another can help develop language awareness and understand complexities around grammar or meaning. Using a range of languages to discuss, generate ideas and plan (in writing for example) can lead to more complex, higher level results in the target language.

If language mixing and translanguaging increasingly characterises the way we communicate in diverse societies, then why not prepare students for this reality in our classes? Enforcing a 'target-language-only' blanket policy (eg. English only in classes in London) creates an artificial, inauthentic environment. It can be fruitful to ask students about their views (language ideologies is the sociolinguistic term) on things like language mixing, bilingualism and language learning. You can also ask students about their language use (practices is the technical term) in their homes, communities, workplaces etc. so that the learning can be as relevant as possible (see Ofelia Garcia, *Problematizing the Linguistic Integration of Migrants: the role of translanguaging and Language teachers*, 2018).

In addition to sound pedagogic logic, there are also important political reasons to welcome multilingualism and linguistic pluralism in our classes. Across Europe, language is being used as a proxy for racism with people who are hostile to immigration and diversity not only demanding that immigrants learn the language of their new country but also demanding that immigrants stop speaking their other language(s) in public or even at home. In England, and elsewhere, it is a common experience for migrants to be abused in the streets or in public places for speaking languages other than English. Of course language teachers acknowledge the importance of learning the language(s) of the nation and/or local community but we should also celebrate the benefits of speaking more than one language at an individual and a societal level. Where better to show that migrants are welcome and migrants' languages are welcome than in the language classroom? As teachers we need to make sure that our volunteers are singing from the same hymn sheet and don't (inadvertently) recycle hostile, unwelcoming narratives.