

Acts of identity in the continuum from multilingual practices to language policy

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The present article addresses some theoretical considerations on ecolinguistics on a meso- and micro-scale and then illustrates them through some elements taken from two sets of observations made in multilingual schools in highly multilingual settings, one in Europe (Luxembourg) and the other one in the South Pacific (New Caledonia). Both case studies show the variety of possibilities in the management of classroom ecologies. According to the specific environments, there are very different ways to foster the communication and the development of pupils and younger children, depending also on their autonomy and their access to empowerment in the educational process. Multilingual strategies at school can be situated on a continuous scale from more implicit to more explicit policies and they have to be considered in relationship to other social structures with importance for education like the family or the workplace or leisure time occupations.

From multilingual practices to language policy, step by step

Education occupies the pivot position between the individual development and the collective sphere of a person. Family and school play a central role in the educational process of personal development. In traditional societies, their roles were well defined, with a clear idea of their limitations. Nowadays, however, in very complex environments there is a great variety of options and possibilities for the creation of a dynamic social network. Languages are not only indicators for complexity, but also vectors of innovation and means of constituting acts of identity. Multilingual strategies are used in a continuum between individual strategies and collective activities in the field of language policies. Our approach from the point of view of ecolinguistics aims at showing that the optimal development of a person can be obtained when the individual and the greater social sphere are in balance. This objective is reached not through a one-way-effort in the sense of assimilation

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where one side has to make the totality of the effort, but through accommodation, a process with changes from all the partners included. For school and institutional education, this means that the children will have to adapt to school and the official system, at least to a certain extent, but at the same time, school should observe changes in society and create educational structures which are able to take into consideration the high variety in the profiles of their pupils. In what follows I want to present some theoretical considerations on ecolinguistics and illustrate them through two sets of observations in multilingual schools in highly multilingual settings, one in Europe (Luxembourg) and the other one in the South Pacific (New Caledonia). Both case studies illustrate the variety of possibilities in the management of classroom ecologies. According to the specific environments, there are very different ways to foster the communication and the development of pupils, depending also on their autonomy and their access to empowerment in the educational process. Multilingual strategies at school can be situated on a continuous scale from more implicit to more explicit policies.

1. Language ecology of the classroom in educational planning and teacher education

My contribution aims at extending the use of traditional language ecology to the specific environment of the classroom in order to observe and analyse the situation of education in plurilingual¹ settings. As Alwin Fill points out: "Ecolinguistics is that branch of linguistics that takes into account the aspect of interaction, whether it is between languages, between speakers, between speech communities, or between language and world, and that in order to promote diversity of phenomena and their interrelations, works in favour of the protection of the small."² By taking an ecolinguistic perspective on school environments, we tend to encourage the development of transversal teaching and learning strategies. Innovative orientations for language planning and teachers' education are the expected outcomes, with the objective of creating a benefit for all the partners in the classroom interaction. For my work as a professor for ethnolinguistics teaching and researching in teacher education programmes for nursery, primary and secondary school teachers in Luxembourg, I use the methodology of action research based on ethnographical field observation of the linguistic and cultural diversity at school. My

research and teaching are also influenced by more than 20 years of field work, observation, teacher education and description of linguistic contact varieties and endangered languages in the South Pacific, in the Americas, in the Mediterranean Region and in different parts of Europe and Asia. In the Luxembourgish projects LACETS and naturalink, my team and I address the complex relationships between language, identity and political power through the observation of teaching and learning practices in Luxembourgish classrooms and the description of the roles of the different languages in the classroom ecologies of this complex communicative context. We cooperate intensively with partners from the schools, from local administration and from the Ministry of Education. Thus we elaborate new concepts and new strategies to be used in the field of language learning and language acquisition, discuss them with the principal actors and reflect the results of this construction in publications of our final research conclusions. We hope them to be of some use for our national and also the international research communities we are taking part in.³ By putting together, in a conjoint view, the natural environments of language acquisition and the more institutionalised ones of language learning, we aim at optimizing the educational environment for all children by giving them the best possible chances for their cognitive, social and personal development. The accent is on children – or pupils in the context of the classroom – and not on disciplines or isolated items of knowledge; and their development should never be seen as a value isolated from their person, their social environment or their identical choices. We are convinced that this attitude can be enhanced by the introduction of an ecolinguistic attitude in the relationship between teachers and pupils in the classroom and generally speaking, in the educational system.⁴

What is the use of applying an ecological view to the school environment? In his recent book on language management, Spolsky (2009) ranks schools amongst the most outstanding domains for language policy and language development of our societies. However, this field has not been the main focus for ecolinguists up to now. Leo van Lier, in *Ecology and Semiotics of Language Learning* (2004: ix) points at the limitations of ecolinguistics for research as they can be observed presently: "There is an important and fascinating tradition of ecology in linguistics (...), but by and by this has focused on the macro aspects of the field. e.g. in terms of language contact, policy, linguistic rights, and so on. Vital though this work is (...), it is worth pointing out that in ecological psychology the focus has been more on the micro

3. The experience gathered in two projects with the Max-Planck-Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig and the University of Freiburg/Germany (APICS & WAVE), has shown me the importance of the social matrix in the formation of contact languages.

4. For a comprehensive view of the psycholinguistic and the sociolinguistic orientations in language acquisition, see also: Larsen-Freeman 2002.

1. For the definition of plurilingual and multilingual, see: Ehrhart, S., Hélot, C. & Le Nevez, A. (eds) 2010. *Plurilinguisme et formation des enseignants: Une approche critique/Plurilinguism and Teacher Education: A Critical Approach* [Collection MSU Mehrsprachigkeit in Schule und Unterricht, Reihenherausgeber S. Breidbach, G. Bach, Gethard & D. Wolff]. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

2. Fill 1993, p. 133 quoted in the translation by Bang & Door 2007, p. 206.

side of things." Indeed schools have a very challenging position between the macro-level of observation within the society as a whole and the micro-level of psycholinguistics of the individual person. Creese and Martin have been conducting research projects in the field of classroom ecologies in England and on the Asian continent; their findings have an impact on the whole international research community, they underline the necessity to do more research work in this field: "Despite the increasing interest in the ecology of language, and the link with language policy and planning, there are few studies which focus on the intern relationships between languages and their speakers in the educational context, specifically, the multilingual classes. (...) It is our opinion that a fuller discussion of the language ecology of multilingual classrooms is required. We feel it is important to explore the ecological minutiae of interactional practices within such environments (...)."⁵

The following items and discourse strategies of the plurilingual classroom in connection to the social environment are of importance for our educational systems of today:

1. Introduction of new mediation tools for use in complex plurilingual contexts with children having a wide range of linguistic and cultural resources at their disposition like code-switching, receptive or dual-lingualism, translanguaging, interlinguistic mediation (Auer, García)
2. Enhancement of teachers' attitudes for transversal strategies of language teaching and learning, strengthening of the attitude of language awareness (Perregaux).
3. Translation and interlinguistic and intercultural mediation, with a discussion about their usefulness according to the specific situations and their limitations.
4. Empowerment of the languages used in the home context of the children (Hélot).
5. Study of language and socialization/social integration in complex settings and in a life-long perspective (Kramsch, Lemke).
6. Discussion of the relationship between languages, multiple identities and political power structure: languages as instruments of distribution for political power, visible and invisible languages (de Mejía).
7. Strengthening of regional and minority languages and language needs arising from expansion, integration, migration and globalisation – reflexion on social memory (Cenoz/Gurter).
8. Contribution to the definition of competences in a synergetic view (the teaching of languages and through languages; interdisciplinary approach, CLIL-teaching); Plurilingual competencies (Castellotti/Moore).

5. Creese and Martin 2008, Vol. 9 on the subject of the Ecology of Language, within the Encyclopedia by Hornberger.

9. Discussion of the effectiveness of formal and informal language learning and definition of meaningful contexts for plurilingual communication aiming the optimal development of all pupils and students, in order to make the classroom an ecology in which language learning occurs naturally and where unreal learning contexts are avoided (Mühlhäusler, Wodak).
10. Language planning and community planning models (Garcia and Bartlett), Family language policy (Spolsky).

These points can serve as guidelines for ethnographic observation aiming at a better understanding of what happens in our multilingual classes. We expect from our teachers today that they are aware of the existence of different types of "good practice" of language management in the classroom and that they have the competence to apply them in their teaching according to the needs of the situation. Spolsky (2009) uses different expressions to describe what people do with languages. On the scale from more implicit to more explicit, these are "managing languages", "language management" (the verbal expression is more pragmatic than the nominal construction) and also language policy, on a more abstract level still. These different levels can appear to be combined with restrictive or with more tolerant attitudes towards linguistic diversity. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Division des langues vivantes, Strasbourg 2011) makes an interesting distinction between the existence of several school languages in divided parallel worlds (multilingualism) and the interconnection between all languages present (plurilingualism). Let us now have a look at places illustrating interesting practices concerning the ecology of the classroom.

2. Luxembourg – a long history of linguistic diversity at school and in society

The Luxembourg region has been the continuous meeting point of two cultures, the Germanic and the Romanic one. Those different populations were geographically distributed according to their language (roughly speaking, the Eastern part of the country was speaking a Germanic language and the Western part a Romanic one), but starting from the Middle Ages, there was a bilingual teaching system that united both linguistic groups⁶. In the 19th century, with the incorporation of the Walloon (French speaking) district into the Kingdom of Belgium in 1839, the new country of Luxembourg was built with a Germanic speaking population. However,

6. As everywhere in Europe, at this period, education was restricted to a very small elite and organized by the Church. Bilingual classes in this case could mean the use of either German or French in combination with Latin. Secular generalized education for the whole of the young people of a generation has come into being only during the last two centuries.

French was kept as the written language for official purposes and also in higher education.⁷

Today, the eastern and northern parts of Luxembourg are said to have a slight preference for the two Germanic languages (German and Luxembourgish) and the South (close to the French border) as well as the city of Luxembourg in the centre of the country are considered to be closer to French. Even if there may be variations in the proficiency of one or the other language or in the attitude towards their use, at the individual or at the collective level, the same type of trilingual primary education is given everywhere in the public school system of the whole country. For an observer coming from outside the country of a very limited extension – with only 2500 square kilometres – it is puzzling to see how much variety exists on the geographical and even more on the individual level: each Luxembourg has his or her special combination of language biographies.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, immigration has been playing a very important part in Luxembourg's economic and demographic development. Currently, Luxembourg's population is defined by an extremely high percentage of with roots from abroad: some 40% of the global population and more than 65% of the active population do not have the Luxembourgish nationality. People of Portuguese origin still constitute the biggest group living in the country for the moment, but the origins of migrants have increasingly diversified during the last decades. This evolution has made the language situation still more complex and Fernand Fehlen quotes Nico Weber saying about the Luxembourgish language use and society (Secolul:3) "French is what keeps it together, multilingualism (and polyglossia) is what keeps it going, and Lëtzebuergesch is what keeps it apart."

The vision of the Ministry of Education on the matter of linguistic diversity is the following: "The country's official languages are Luxembourgish, French and German. For Luxembourg, this trilingualism is vital, for reasons of its intensive exchanges with its neighbouring countries as well as the country's geographical position on the crossroads of two major linguistic spaces, the German and the French. The language of the Luxembourgers is Luxembourgish. The main language used between Luxembourgers and foreign language fellow citizens is French. The teaching of languages holds an important place in Luxembourg's educational system."⁸

7. See also Gilles & Mounin 2003, Rapport National Luxembourg 2005, Profil de la politique linguistique éducative 2005–2006; Horner & Weber 2008; Weber 2008; Fehlen (different publications, see references) and Ehrhart and Fehlen (2011).

8. Hommage of the Ministry of Education, summer 2008, www.men.lu.

We will first have a look at the existing structures of the national educational system⁹ before we discuss their adaptation to the demographic, economic and cultural changes the country is experiencing. The most striking point of the Luxembourgish school system is the number of used languages and their order of introduction¹⁰:

Early childhood education from age 3 to 4 is optional, preschool education from 4 to 6 is compulsory. At this stage, the language of schooling is Luxembourgish. Primary education is for pupils between 6 and 12 years; reading and writing is taught in German and the teaching language for grades 1 to 6 is German. From the second half of grade 2, when they are 8 years old, children begin to learn French. There are special linguistic arrangements for the great number of newly arrived pupils. Schooling for pupils from 12 to 17 years of age is compulsory; it can be either through technical secondary education or through classical secondary education which lasts 7 years. According to the National Curriculum, a good knowledge of German and French is required from the first year. English is taught from the second year. Subject learning is officially done through French and German, only physical education can be taught in Luxembourgish. Generally speaking, German is still stronger in grade 7 to 9 and from grade 10 to 13 French is becoming the main "vehicular language".¹¹ After the age of 6, Lëtzebuergesch – the "national language of the Luxembourgers"¹² is hardly mentioned as language of instruction.

Because of the important demographic changes as a consequence of migration during the last decades, the ecology of the Luxembourg school population fits less and less into the tradition-based language planning: more than half of the school population does not speak Luxembourgish at home – which is the first school language in preschool – and only about one or two per cent of the population has German as a mother tongue, but it is the language of literacy for everyone and very few people have French as a first language, but it is used more and more not only as teaching subject, but as a medium for subject learning. Therefore, most of the pupils in Luxembourgish schools (as most of the workers in the offices and workshops of

9. Attending school is compulsory over two years of pre-primary education (starting at the age of 4) followed by nine years of primary and secondary education. According to the 25-year-old language law, Loi du 24 février 1984 sur le régime des langues, Luxembourgish is the national language of all Luxembourgers, French is the language of legislation and French, German and Luxembourgish are the languages of administration and jurisdiction.

10. Information from the Ministry of Education: www.men.lu

11. I am grateful to Marie-Paule Maurer-Hetto, Marie-Anne-Pauly and Vic Jovanovic for giving me information on the Luxembourgish school system.

12. According to the Language Law Loi du 24 février 1984 sur le régime des langues, Luxembourgish is the national language of all Luxembourgers, French is the language of legislation and French, German and Luxembourgish are the languages of administration and jurisdiction.

the country) use their L2, L3 or L4 and L5 for important parts of their everyday communication. This is an enormous challenge for educational language ecology and language planning for education in general and there are strong initiatives within the Ministry of Education to find new paths (Plan d'Action Langues pour le Réajustement des Langues à l'École, Initiative on Language Awareness, to be consulted on the homepage of the Ministry of Education). For the first time in the school system, the directives of the new government that entered into function in summer 2009 indicate the possibility for larger groups of students to choose a type of education with less linguistic diversity (for instance, more French for those with another romance language as one of their home languages). By doing so, planners must be very careful to avoid the creation or consolidation of inequality in the educational structures. This restriction of the number of languages used at school might be seen as a way of bringing social justice, but it might as well produce exactly the opposite effect with a phenomenon of ghettoization, by restricting the possibilities to attend the more prestigious kinds of schools (for instance the classical instead of the technical branches of the secondary education) to the weaker parts of the population. In this special situation, linguistic diversity would then act as a filter to social mobility: the possibility to use some languages would empower only certain groups, or a more reduced variety of pluri- or multilingualism or a lesser valued language combination could constitute a restriction on the possibilities of professional development of the individual user of the languages.

In the future, it will be important to document innovative initiatives in the field of linguistic and cultural diversity like the ones developed by Sylvie Elcherath at the Neie Lycée and in the introduction classes for freshly arrived pupils in Luxembourg City or Idalina Klein Soares in Mersch (Northern Luxembourg) and to foster exchange on those good practices (Carola Mick, Sarah Vasco). It is important to combine bottom up and top down movements in order to create maximum social cohesion (Cichon, Ehrhart & Stegu 2012).

In conclusion we can say that Luxembourg is an example of a relatively explicit language policy for educational settings. Although it is in favour of multi- and plurilingualism, not all the languages are treated the same way; they do not have the same statute either.

Our next historical example from the South Pacific will show us how communities can manage language diversity at school in a more implicit way.

3. Tayo de Saint-Louis: The genesis of a school creole

Creole languages have a pivot position in society because they enable people coming from different horizons to enter into contact. They represent natural strategies

to create linguistic bridges between cultures, as their users create them in order to facilitate communication and to assure a common area of exchange. In some special cases, the different partner communities merge to a stronger extent and form a new community. In this environment, through a higher concentration of acts of identity a new common language and culture emerges. The new language and culture are composed of elements of the former partners, but they also present innovative elements which cannot be directly retraced to the original language partners. According to Raible 2003, there are two ways of formation for a Creole, either in a bottom-up movement (more common for English-based creoles) or in a movement coming from top down (more frequent with French-based Creoles). We have observed cases in which both movements merge, and the "school creoles" that emerged in some regions of South Pacific Islands like Hawai'i or New Caledonia (Baker 2001) are good illustrations of this two-way-process as they combine natural and institutional ways of multilingual communication. In Ehrhart 2012, Vianney Wamytan informs us about the creole genesis of Tayo spoken in the Saint-Louis tribe of New Caledonia which can be characterized as a school creole. The Saint Louis tribe was initially created as a reduction by the catholic missionaries with young men stemming from more than a dozen different linguistics groups from the whole island of New Caledonia, and not only from the South where the mission is situated. The initial aim of the Fathers was to form young men from their missionary school to become missionaries themselves (at the very beginning, they were taught Latin) was not reached. An important part of them got married to young girls from the boarding school educated by the catholic nuns living nearby at Saint Louis mission as well. Some of these young girls were orphans; others were the offspring of temporary unions between European men and Kanak women and they generally had a good command of the French language and much less so in Melanesian languages. In the creation period of the tribe at the end of the 19th century, Melanesian languages of the main regions of origin were still in use, especially with men and in ceremonial settings like meetings at the chief's house. All the children went to school with French as the only teaching language. The teachers were Fathers, Brothers and Sisters from metropolitan France. In 1863, the colonial government had forbidden the use of local languages as teaching supports and also as teaching subjects, but the great amount of present local languages at the Saint Louis mission school would have made it difficult altogether to choose one or more school languages. Especially the men of the first generation had relatively little command of French and the oral tradition tells us that their women frequently translated for them. The children born in the first decades of the 20st century still spoke actively one, two, three or more of the Kanak languages in use at the tribe. For those born after 1920, there was still passive knowledge (especially as the parents started to use Kanak languages as secret languages to discuss

matters they did not want to be understood by the children), but it diminished more and more and gave place to some isolated segments only. One factor that played in favour of its decrease was the fact that there were several local languages – at least four played a very important role in the tribe – and that there was no intercomprehension between them which would have facilitated further learning of the neighbours' language. On the other hand, the interlanguage used by members of the first generation – often called “bad French” – became a creole language with a full grammar. Our informant was born in 1920 and he considers Tayo, the creole language of his tribe, as his “mother tongue”. This is still so until today. Vianney Wamytan remembers school at the same time as a meeting place where the contact language could evolve and an environment where the use of Kanak languages was officially forbidden. However, the real situation at school – the management of languages by the pupils themselves – described by our informant shows rich and diverse linguistic resources and the great flexibility of the users to take advantage of all of them, through interlinguistic mediation strategies like translation, code-switching or the creation of interlanguages for communication. Only after some decades, there has been a progressive diminution of the use of the Kanak languages because the families abandoned varieties, regional varieties and varieties identical or close to the standard version of French. For all these reasons, Tayo is a creole in the joint creation of explicite and top-down policies (school programmes) in combination with implicite and bottom-up language management (strategies of the pupils). The main impetus for the emergence of this new language is the wish of the group of settlers at Saint-Louis mission to become a community with a shared language and culture. In order to achieve this aim, intercomprehension has to be maximized.

4. Conclusions

There are different degrees of diversity in multilingual schools. Our examples from Luxembourg and New Caledonia show cases of very high diversity. In Luxembourg, this is due to the multilingual history of the country and a high level of immigration. In Saint-Louis, the mission was the creation of the Catholic Fathers with young people bringing more than 20 tongues to the school environment. In both cases, there is/was an official ideology trying to rule language policies applied in the educational system and at the same time, the pupils show autonomous initiatives that do not always go in the same direction. Quite often, the strategies employed by the children happen to be more effective for communication and we think that we should more often have a look at their solutions, in order to create

innovative school environments with linguistic and cultural ecologies that are respectful of the resources of all participants.

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