Conclusion

A Report has been or will be shortly issued by the Council of Europe for each of the above workshops. Each contains the names and addresses of the Director of Studies, animators and nationally nominated participants, from whom further information may be sought. For each 'new-style' workshop, separate reports are issued for the 'A' and 'B' workshops, as well as a Second Progress Report giving details of inter-workshop projects.

The papers by Daniel Coste and Brian North which follow have been produced in the context of a proposed Common European Framework for the description of language learning, teaching and assessment now in its Second Draft, thoroughly revised following an extensive field consultation. The Framework itself and an associated proposal for a European Language Portfolio will be the subject of a future issue.

Multilingual and multicultural competence and the role of school

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(based on Coste, Moore, Zarate 1997)[1]

From communicative competence to plurilingual and pluricultural competence

Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw. The plurilingual and pluricultural competence, as defined here, is to be seen as simply giving a slightly different scope to the notion of communicative competence.

Whatever the original characteristics of the concept of communicative competence (Hymes emphasised the heterogeneity of linguistic communities and individual competences), it has developed, in the language teaching field, according to the model of the ideal native communicator: communicative competence is then characterised as adding to the strictly linguistic competence sociolinguistics and pragmatic abilities, knowledge and dispositions of speakers who are implicitly assumed to be monolingual natives or who are at least regarded as operating in circumstances of endolingual communication (i.e. communication involving persons deemed to have a perfect, homogenous command of the resources of the medium used, namely their first language). The objectives of foreign language learning tend therefore

to be described in reference to this native-speaker competence. The learner is not explicitly taken into account as a plurilingual communicator (able, for example, to call on the resources of his or her mother tongue or of another foreign language of which (s)he already has some knowledge).

It is to be noted as well that, even though, from an epistemic point of view, the concept of communicative competence is related to cultural anthropology, the dominant tendency in the language teaching and learning sector has been to interpret it in linguistic rather than cultural terms. The main stress has been placed more on the multiplicity of means of expressing language acts or functions taken as largely transversal, at the expense of the variety of cultural circumstances in which these functions are enacted and assume specific meanings. Intra- and inter-linguistic variation have been accorded greater importance than intra- and inter-cultural differentiation. With the probable exception of cases of what has been called 'intercultural pedagogy' and 'language awareness' experiences, a realisation of the multiplicity of cultures and the capacity to perceive, observe, objectivise this multiplicity, are only exceptionally considered in the teaching and learning project as far as the development of communicative competence is concerned.

Compared with the representation of the ideal communicator, plurilingual and pluricultural competence is usually uneven in one or more ways :

- generally greater proficiency in one language as compared with the others ;
- different profile of competences in one language as compared with others (for example, excellent speaking competence in two languages, but good writing competence in only one of them, with a third language being only mastered as regards written comprehension, without any real oral ability);

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- pluricultural profile different from the plurilingual profile (for example: good knowledge of the culture of a community but a poor knowledge of its language, or poor knowledge of a community whose dominant language is nevertheless well mastered).

Such imbalances are entirely normal and if, as is desirable, the concept of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism is extended to include the situation of the majority of social agents who, in their native language and culture are exposed to different linguistic variants and cultural variation in the course of socialisation, it is clear that here again imbalances (or, if preferred, different types of balance) are the norm.

A further characteristic of plurilingual and pluricultural competence is that it is not the result of the simple addition of monolingual competences, but it permits combinations and alternations of different kinds. It is possible to switch codes, during a message, to resort to bilingual forms of speech. A single, richer repertoire of language varieties and available options thus allows choices based on this interlinguistic variation when circumstances permit. It also means that plurilingual and pluricultural competence may promote the emergence of linguistic awareness, and even of metacognitive strategies which enable the social agent to become aware of and to control his or her own 'spontaneous' ways of handling tasks and in particular their linguistic dimension. In addition, this experience of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism:

- exploits pre-existing sociolinguistic and pragmatic capacities in communicative competence, which makes them more complex in return;
- leads to a better perception of what is general and what is specific in the linguistic organisation of different languages;
- by its nature refines knowledge of how to learn and the capacity to form relations with others and deal with new situations.

It may, therefore, to some degree accelerate subsequent learning in the linguistic and cultural areas. This is the case even if plurilingual and pluricultural competence is 'unbalanced' and if proficiency in a particular language remains 'partial'.

It can be claimed, moreover, that while the knowledge of one foreign language and culture does not always lead to going beyond what may be ethnocentric in relation to the 'native' language and culture, and may even have the opposite effect, a knowledge of several languages is more likely to achieve this, while at the same time enriching the potential for learning.

In this type of analysis, respect for the diversity of languages and the recommendation that more than one foreign language be learnt at school are significant. The issue here is not one of simply making a linguistic policy choice at an important point in the history of Europe, nor even – however important this aim may be – of increasing future opportunities for young people competent in more than two languages. It is also a matter of helping learners:

- to construct their linguistic and cultural identity by incorporating in it a diversified experience of others;
- to develop their ability to learn through this same diversified experience as a result of relating to several languages and cultures.

It is in this perspective also that the concept of *partial competence* in a particular language is meaningful: it does not mean being satisfied, for reasons of principle or pragmatism, with a very limited mastery of a foreign language by a learner, but, rather, of seeing this mastery, imperfect at a given moment, as forming part of a *multiple* competence which it enriches. It should also be pointed out that this 'partial' competence is at the same time a *functional* competence with respect to a specific limited objective. The partial competence may concern *language activities* (e.g. receptive activities, for example with the emphasis on oral or written comprehension); it may concern a particular *domain* and specific *tasks*. But it may also involve *general competences* (for example non-linguistic knowledge about the characteristics of other languages and cultures and their communities). It must therefore be restated positively with respect to the concept of plurilingual and pluricultural competence. A competence in a given language is partial where (i) it is part of a plurilingual competence which encompasses it and (ii) it enables the user for certain language activities or domains, as far as this language is concerned.

Plurilingual and pluricultural competence is not considered here to be stabilised and (un)balanced in a particular way once and for all. Depending on the path followed by the social agent, the shape of this competence evolves, becomes enriched with new components, supplements or transforms certain others, and leaves others to wither away. This is a normal effect of occupational, geographical and family movements, and of changing personal interests.

School and the construction of a plurilingual and pluricultural competence

Curriculum design of any kind in language learning (no doubt even more so than in other disciplines and other types of learning) implies choices between kinds and levels of objective.

Teaching/learning objectives may in fact be conceived in terms of:

a) the development of the individual learner's general competences and thus be a matter of declarative knowledge (*savoir*), skills and know-how (*savoir-faire*), personality traits, attitudes, etc. (*savoir-être*) or ability to learn or, more particularly, one or other of these dimensions;

b) the extension and diversification of communicative language competence and then be concerned with the linguistic component, or the pragmatic component or the sociolinguistic component, or all of these;

c) the better performance in one or more specific language activities and then be a matter of reception, production, interaction or mediation;

d) optimal functional performance in a given domain and thus concern the public domain, the occupational domain, the educational domain or the personal domain.

Defining objectives in this manner is not a stylistic exercise but illustrates the possible diversity of learning aims and the variety to be found in the provision of teaching. Obviously, a great many types of provision, in and out of school, cover several of these objectives at the same time. And equally obviously, pursuing a specifically designated objective also means that the achievement of the stated objective will lead to other results which were not specifically aimed at or which were not the main concern.

One can remark that language teaching in schools has to a large extent tended to stress objectives concerned with either the individual's general competence (especially at primary school level) or communicative language competence, while courses for adults (students or people already working) often formulate objectives in terms of specific language activities or functional ability in a particular domain. This emphasis, in the case of the former on the construction and development of competence, and in the latter case on optimal preparation for activities concerned with functioning in a specific context, corresponds no doubt to the distinct roles of general initial education on the one hand and specialised and continuing education on the other.

This kind of comment can of course be related to the notion of partial competence, as characterised above. With reference to curriculum planning, it should be stressed that:

• all knowledge of a language is partial, however much of a 'mother tongue' or 'native language' it seems to be. It is always incomplete both in so far as it could never be as developed or perfect in an ordinary individual as it would be for the utopian, 'idealised' speaker, and also because a given individual never has equal mastery of the different component parts of the language in question, for example (of oral and written skills, or of comprehension and interpretation and production skills);

• any partial knowledge is also more complete than it might seem: for instance, in order to achieve the 'limited' goal of increasing understanding of specialised texts in a given foreign language on very familiar subjects it is necessary to acquire knowledge and skills which could also be used for many other purposes;

• those who have learnt one language also know a great deal about many other languages without necessarily realising that they do; the learning of other languages generally facilitates the activation of this knowledge and increases awareness of it, which is a factor to be taken into account rather than proceeding as if it did not exist.

Although leaving a very broad freedom of choice in drawing up curricula and progression, these observations on objectives and competences may help efforts to adopt a transparent and coherent approach when identifying options and making decisions.

At this point, one may wonder what definite action can be taken by the school to develop plurilingual competences in the meaning already given to that concept. Its first and main contribution might be to set up an initial 'portfolio' of linguistic and cultural 'assets', related to different languages and cultures. Neither the economic and even stock-exchange connotations of the term 'porfolio' nor the multiple meanings of 'asset' are irrelevant to that statement. The school, a place of investment for various types of social actors, should be seen as an opportunity to contribute (or add to) an initial and diversified capital, which individuals can then exploit through suitable investments on different 'markets'. Everything suggests that the professional and personal futures of individual pupils will depend more on the degree of openness of their range of competences than on any particular initial specialisation. A first portfolio of competences, unbalanced as it might be, is valuable not only for the major capacities of which it is composed, but also for the variety of experience to which it attests. This applies particularly to languages and cultures.

The school's first duty regarding languages and cultures is, then, partly contrary to its formerly established functions, to contribute to:

• the drawing up of a plurilingual and pluricultural profile;

• familiarisation with the various resources enabling this profile to be further developed;

• progressive mastery of the means permitting dynamic management of this multiple competence;

• positive recognition of the diversified knowledge and skills thus acquired.

The ultimate goal is that, on leaving the initial school system, the learner should possess a plurilingual

and pluricultural competence which is deliberately transitory and heterogeneous, although unified in one repertoire, but that he or she should also have been able to work using varied learning materials, have tested various learning routes and have accordingly enriched his or her own perceptions of languages, cultures and learning pathways.

Suggestions for further reading

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Perspectives on language proficiency and aspects of competence[2]

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1. Theoretical perspectives

The purpose of the study of which this paper is a summary was to explore issues in the nature of proficiency and its relationship to competence as part of a process of trying to identify possible categories for description in a common reference framework.

There is some confusion over whether or not the concept of ability should be included in the term 'competence' due to the use of the term in two schools of thought which come together in language learning: a cognitive school (linguistics) and a behavioural school (communication).

- From a linguistic viewpoint, following Chomsky's original distinction between competence and performance (Chomsky 1965:4), competence has been seen as 'a certain mental state' excluding ability (Chomsky 1980:48). Widdowson (1989:130) considered that Chomsky's pragmatic competence does implicitly include ability, a line developed by McNamara (1995:163) who sees Chomsky's pragmatic competence as a model of idealised performance. But many applied linguists

who have developed key aspects of models of communicative competence have explicitly maintained the Chomskyan distinction, for example Canale and Swain (1980:6–7) and Gumperz (1982; 1984).

- From a behavioural viewpoint, however, competence has been consistently taken to include 'a combination of knowledge and skill' with 'proficiency in skills ...(being) required for the manifestation of communicative competence' (Wiemann and Backlund 1980:190). Hymes understands competence 'to be dependent on two things: (tacit) knowledge and (ability for) use' (Hymes 1971:16; 1972:282) and as McNamara (1995:162) points out, Hymes' model includes a range of non-cognitive attributes taken over from Goffman (1967:224) such as gameness, composure, presence of mind, stage confidence, attributes related to the 'naturalness' and 'poise' included by Savignon (1972) in her foreign language assessment criteria in 1972.

The behavioural view implies the centrality of socio-cultural competence in addition to such 'personality' factors. Widdowson (1983:83–4) considers that competence consists of schematic (socio-cultural) and systemic (linguistic) knowledge, with