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Being plurilingual and acting interculturally

Definitions

- Being plurilingual is a state (of mind/ of competence(s)) at a given point in time. It is a concept developed within a theory of language users being social actors (Common European Framework) – and to this extent has *potential* for action.
- Being pluricultural is also a state (less thoroughly researched and more complex). It involves being able to identify in different ways and degrees with the values, beliefs and behaviours of a number of social groups, some of which may be marked by language and be 'national/ethnic' groups. Here, again, there is *potential* for action.
- Acting interculturally puts the emphasis on *activity*. This is to emphasise that having (some degree of) intercultural competence does not entail identity change or identification with specific (language) groups. Acting interculturally pre-supposes certain attitudes, knowledge and skills (of intercultural competence, e.g. the five 'savoirs' of Byram, 1997, but there are other models too) but does not pre-suppose identification (nor does it exclude identification). The emphasis is on the action of *mediation* by an 'intercultural speaker'. This action may involve any social groups but in our context we focus on being an intercultural speaker who can mediate between/ among two or more groups marked by difference of language (which are most often national/ethnic groups).

Theoretical framework

ON BEING 'BICULTURAL' AND ACTING 'INTERCULTURALLY'

BICULTURAL	←-----→	INTERCULTURAL
IDENTITY		ACTIVITY
SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY SELF/OTHER ASCRIPTION		COMPETENCE THEORY
		DEFINITION OF OBJECTIVES
I.E. DESCRIPTION		I.E. ASPIRATION
<i>ROLE OF EDUCATION:</i> TO HELP UNDERSTAND IDENTITIES		TO DEVELOP COMPETENCES

The theoretical starting point for discussing bi/pluriculturalism is social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981). This allows us to describe and discuss (DESCRIPTION in above) how individuals identify with different social groups and what may be the tensions involved in identifying with two groups of the same kind e.g. two language groups such as 'the Germans' and 'the Poles'.

The starting point for theorising intercultural competence is competence theory (Fleming, 2006). This allows us to postulate what competences are desirable in intercultural interaction (ASPIRATION in above), and to use these postulates as a means of planning education.

So the role of education for bi/pluricultural people (e.g. members of ethnic linguistic minorities) is to help them understand their situation and how others respond to it. The role in intercultural education is to plan and teach systematically the competences appropriate for a given situation.

Significance for language teaching (in Europe)

- Purposes of language teaching
The distinction between 'pluricultural' and 'intercultural' clarifies the purposes:
 - not to imitate nature (naturally bilingual and bicultural) speakers who identify with two or more linguistic (national/ethnic) groups.
 - but to teach and assess defined attitudes, knowledge and skills (which are both culture-general and culture-specific) according to educational objectives using appropriate methods.
- Cross/inter-disciplinary potential for language teaching:
 - the teaching (and assessing) of intercultural competence is not confined to language teaching, except where foreign language competence is crucial.
 - potential links to history (other cultures in the past) and education about religious (as opposed to religious instruction) which also deals with other social (religious) groups, and to human geography (also dealing with other social groups defined by values, beliefs and behaviours).
 - potential links to education for (democratic) citizenship – see second think-piece.

Questions

- Is this 'educational' perspective also applicable to 'training'?
- What implications for teacher education?
 - what competences needed by teachers (in addition to language competences)?

- How can an 'overcrowded' syllabus be extended?

Fleming, M. 2006, The use and mis-use of competence frameworks and statements with particular attention to describing achievements in literature. Conference paper, Krakow, April 2006

Tajfel, H. 1981, *Human Groups and social Categories. Studies in social psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chap 13 The achievement of group differentiation. Pp 268-287

Further:

Byram, M. 2003, On being 'bicultural' and 'intercultural'. In Alred, G., Byram, M. and Fleming, M. (eds.) *Intercultural experience and education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters

(www.multilingual-matters.co.uk)

Education for Citizenship

Definitions and descriptions

- in Europe, there is an assumption that 'democratic citizenship' is the only 'proper' citizenship – an assumption which needs analysis but which is accepted for the sake of the argument here.
- education for democratic citizenship has teaching and learning objectives which emphasise activity, knowledge and identification

The English National Curriculum makes this explicit in its statement of the elements of citizenship:

- Social and moral responsibility:
Pupils learning – from the very beginning – self-confidence and socially and morally responsible behaviour both in and beyond the classroom, towards those in authority and towards each other.
- Community involvement:
Pupils learning about becoming helpfully involved in the life and concerns of their neighbourhood and communities, including learning through community involvement and service to the community.
- Political literacy:
Pupils learning about the institutions, problems and practices of our democracy and how to make themselves effective in the life of the nation, locally, regionally and nationally through skills and values as well as knowledge – a concept wider than political knowledge alone.

The outcomes of citizenship education are then summarised in the following terms:

Pupils develop skills of enquiry, communication, participation and responsible action ... through creating links between pupils' learning in the classroom and activities that take place across the school, in the community and the wider world.

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/citizenship/section.cfm?sectionId=3&hierachy=1.3> (accessed 21 Dec 06)

However, the community is assumed to be local and national and this assumption is also found in definitions and objectives for citizenship education at European level (Council of Europe, EDC project)

Complementarity

- Objectives for EDC overlap with objectives for Intercultural Competence AND add a further dimension with emphasis on activity/ involvement/ taking (political) action,
- Focus of foreign language teaching is on internationalism and objectives of intercultural communicative competence focus on acting as a mediator/ intercultural speaker between people of different language identities,
- Foreign language teaching and EDC can complement each other by shifting focus to 'international community' and by adding objectives of encouraging/ giving experience of (political) activity in an international community.

International Civil Society

- in democratic states civil society is a crucial complement and challenge to the state.
- in Europe (EU) as a democratic political entity (European citizens voting for a European parliament directed by the European Commission) there is a need for a European civil society.
- competences of 'intercultural citizenship' are needed by individuals who are to be encouraged to become involved in European civil society.
- objectives (and a framework for planning a curriculum) for intercultural citizenship can be defined by combining FLE and EDC.

Questions

- Are language teachers ready to handle values and conflicting ideologies?
- How can language teachers be assured that language competence is not neglected?
- How do different education systems react to 'teaching values' and/or 'inciting action'?

Reference

Byram, M. 2006, Developing a concept of intercultural citizenship. In Alred, G., Byram, M. and Fleming, M. (eds.) *Education for intercultural citizenship. Concepts and comparisons*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters (www.multilingual-matters.co.uk)