This paper is taken from

A Europe of Many Cultures
Proceedings of the fifth Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Thematic Network

London: CiCe 2003

edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 1 85377 369 7

CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- Cass Mitchell-Riddle, head of the CiCe Coordination Unit
- London Metropolitan University for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The SOCRATES programme and the personnel of DGXXII for their support and encouragement.

The potentialities of children in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual context

Annemarie Dinvaut
IUFM de l'académie de Lyon (France)

For French schools working in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual context, the relationship between teachers and families is a key issue. Within the GRIC (*Groupe de Recherche sur les Interactions Communicatives*) at the Université Lumière Lyon II and the IUFM (Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres) of Lyon I am studying language interactions in a multi-cultural perspective. This research aims to provide the tools to:

- bridge the gap between French teachers and parents who were born (or whose parents were born) in another country;
- encourage the mutual contribution of foreign parents and teachers to the language of children;
- take into account the multi-cultural and multi-lingual potentialities of children;
- help primary school teachers (especially when they are mono-cultural and monolingual) to understand both the possibilities and difficulties presented by and to multi-cultural and multi-lingual pupils;
- allow teachers a better understanding of their pupils through exploring their own linguistic and cultural biographies.

The pupils' languages and cultures offer potential not only for them but for the whole class. However, it is necessary first to study the culture of the teachers and their relationship with language, to determine which professional tools will enable them to take into account their pupils' languages and cultures, and to enhance their potential.

The theoretical sources for this are studies about French and languages in France, sociolinguistics, and studies of bilingualism. Two surveys have been conducted with teachers and teacher trainees over six years: one concerns their language biographies, and the other their conceptions of languages. Lessons and interviews with teachers and with pupils were recorded and transcribed.

The teachers' culture

Monolingual profiles

Teaching attitudes can be influenced by cultural features: the teachers' relationship to languages (mother language, foreign language, daily language or family language) is one such feature. Laurent Gajo's study of bilinguals emphasised that the issue is normally approached from a monolingual perspective, based on 'the western pupil's norm' (Gajo, 2001); the bilingual child is often assessed with criteria conceived by and for monolinguals. Are such tools appropriate? Can we still consider today's European pupil as monolingual? The fact that most teachers in our study are monolingual reinforces this attitude; over 90%[1] speak only French at home, whereas 16.2% of their grandparents used

[1] out of 182 teachers in the area of Lyon, in 2001 and 2002.

to speak another language[2] besides French (Alps dialect, Alsatian, American, Arabic, Catalan, Creole, local dialects, English, Gaelic, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian dialects, Italian, Northern French dialects, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Sicilian, Spanish, Turkish, Vietnamese…). Hover, this linguistic variety is still alive among teachers through their use of everyday expressions.

Difficulties in welcoming linguistic variety

Linguistic and cultural diversities have faded within two generations: they belong now to the passive memory of the teachers. The creation of the Republic schools, and the Jules Ferry reforms of the nineteenth century, are partially responsible for this – these were accepted even by rural or newly urban families: even today local dialects are sometimes described as deviant languages, and teachers assume their mission is to protect the French language. This conception of French also influences the way other languages are considered: Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian are often seen as poor dialects compared with classic Arabic, which is considered the only genuine Arabic. The edict of Villers-Cotteret is thought of as prohibiting local French languages, although in reality it was prohibiting the use of Latin, perceived as the Old Empire language. The curricula of secondary schools, and especially that of History[3], are partly responsible for such mis-information: languages are taught solely as means of communication, without identifying and analysing the links between language and power, language and politics, language and society. No tools for the analysis of language are given to pupils, to teachers, or to parents.

Studies about languages

Studies about linguistic issues are often treated separately: local languages, minority languages, foreign languages and immigrants' languages are dealt with from different points of view. Jacques Darras writes about the languages of Europe but does not mention any language spoken by people who settled three or four generations ago (Darras, 2001). Bernard Poché, as a sociologist, only deals with 'languages of people who settled in Europe in very ancient times', although he underlines the similarities between Arabic and German, since both languages have a written form, hardly ever spoken, and various oral forms (Poche, 2000). Louis-Jean Calvet analyses languages with Swaan's[4] systemic language constellation (Calvet, 1999): one central language, several peripheral languages. This system allows the analysis of the relationship between languages, including that between European languages and other constellations - the Spanish constellation includes South America, the French constellation Africa, whereas Swedish and Danish belong to the English constellation. But Calvet only considers official languages; he does not mention the languages of immigrants. New European constellations where Arabic and Turkish are peripheral languages could have been proposed, for instance. Bernard Cerquiglini includes local French languages, the languages of French territories, such as Creole, and several languages[5] which have 'immigrated' into 'the French

[2] Foreign or local language

[3] We are studying history textbooks. A book published by Belin and edited by V. Zanghellini in 1997, for example, deals with changes in society, urbanisation, industrialisation, and the republican school system from 1848 to 1939; it mentions linguistic issues only three times, twice under titles such as 'The fear of modernity' or 'Conservatism and republican progress: speaking Gaelic in French'.

[4] sic, p. 76.

[5] Maghreb Arabic, western Armenian, Berberian, Romani, Yiddish.

polyphony'(Cerquiglini, 2003, p.10). This picture of the French linguistic landscape is closer to reality, and allows a comparison of different situations and new analyses: Arabic and German can be compared, as well as Turkish and Hungarian, since these languages are both community languages here and official languages in other countries[6]. It is notable from a sociological point of view that French rural families at the beginning of the twentieth century and French Arabic families today demonstrate similar attitudes towards respectively French and English, which are both seen as 'social elevators'.

Welcoming different languages and different cultures into the classroom

Teachers who welcomed their pupils' languages and cultures have been able for some years to find many tools - books, recordings of rhymes, songs, stories and tales from different countries - which can be used to initiate school activities and to build a common class-group culture. But these should not be the only way to introduce a culture: some tend to 'fossilise' cultural elements. Several present genuine oral culture, including language varieties, but are nevertheless to culture what a still-life is to life. In the late fifties, traditional French rhymes were recorded, but they were echoed (and still are) by living practice in families and school-yards. This is not the case when a teacher in Paris uses a recording of Cambodian songs, for instance. To set this culture within the school environment and to give it reality, the teacher needs to introduce elements of pupils' daily life and to build class activities.

The use of the 'frozen screen' by a teacher dealing with the different cultures of his/her pupils is presenting an unrealistic view of his/her pupils' cultures. The culture of a group of children in a French city is not the culture of their grand-parents' country, nor even the culture of their parents in France. Yet when teachers offer ideas about other languages and cultures[7], more than one stereotype in ten refers to the seventies, to the sixties, or even to World War II.

Class situations

Four class situations are presented: in a pre-elementary school a child is invited to tell about his family language; in a primary school an activity invites children to tell about their language, and a second takes into account a child's oral culture; the fourth situation raises questions about a child's judgement about his own family.

In a kindergarten (4-5 years old)

(The interviewer is not the class-teacher[8].) The children are having their fifth English lesson, which is half an hour long. They first counted how many pupils were at school and how many were away; how many were having dinner at school and how many at home.

[6] Hungarian is a community language in Romania and Slovakia, and the official language of Hungary ; Turkish is a community language (though a recent one) in France and Germany, and the official language of Turkey.
[7] The survey was started in 1996, and deals with the conceptions of teacher trainees and teachers about Arabic, English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.
[8] I: interviewer, C: unidentified child, CC: several children – C1, C2, etc: identified children

They did this in English, with the help of the interviewer. They were asked by the interviewer to tell what languages they know (apart from French).

C: *I* speak French
I: you speak French and
C: so do I
C: I know a language I don't remember
I: you don't remember. And you?
C1 (Turkish): well I speak Turkish a little
I: you speak Turkish a little. Then can you and you
C: French
I: and you French yes, (to C2) and you?
C2: I only speak French
I: you only speak French. (To C1) could you tell us something in Turkish?
C1: xxx
I: What could you tell us in Turkish, because *we* don't know any, you could teach us something
C: 'yes'[9], I know 'yes'[10]
CC: xxx
I: then how
C1: I don't remember
I: yes it's difficult to remember when we're at school, we don't think sometimes. Tell me what did you want to say?
C3: I only know two words in Italian
I: In Italian - tell us those two words in Italian
C3: 'no' [11] it means no and 'yes'[12] it means yes
I: ha
C2: *I* can say 'yes'[13] then
I: [The teacher – with some doubt – repeats C3's statement] 'no[14]' it means no and 'yes'[14] it means yes and it is Italian
C3: Yes

[9] the pupil gives the word in English
[10] again, in English
[11] 'Yes' is given in English: the pupil thinks this is an English word
[12] 'No' is given in English
[13] in English
[14] in English
[14] in English

I: well then
CC: it is English, English
C: *I* do know these two words too
I: it is English, it is English, you're right
C4: *I* know these two words
I: *you* know these two words C4
C: so do I
(…)
I: well then, you told me you knew, you knew there was Italian, there was English. Well then, I can't I can't go on to talk with all that noise
C5: I know an English word
I: Well, you know an English word - tell us
C5: 'bye-bye'[15]
I: 'bye-bye'[16]
C: 'bye-bye'[17]
I: good
C5: it means bye-bye
I: what does it mean ?
CC: bye-bye
I: yes, bye-bye, it means bye-bye, yes
CC: 'bye-bye yes hello'[18]
I: yes but *I* didn't hear what you knew because everybody's talking. Then tell it again - no wait, let her speak, then you raise your hand if you want to, yes
C6: I know 'yes'[19] I know 'bye-bye hello'[20] I know 'no'[21]

[15] in English
[16] in English
[17] in English
[18] in English
[19] in English
[20] in English
[21] in English

I: what's the last one
C6: 'no'[22]
I: 'no'[23] they are four English words then
C6: 'hello'[24] means hello
I: 'hello'[25] means hello, 'no'[26] means no, yes and then you will tell us Turkish words, then I will. We are going to learn a short rhyme. Please, please come and bring your chair next to me xxx. It is a short rhyme in an African language call Peul.

This extract confirms two frequent attitudes among pupils: young children (four – to five-year olds) are conscious that different languages exist, even though they are not always able to identify them accurately; and they are eager to share their knowledge about languages they do not speak at home. However, bilingual children find it uncomfortable to evoke the home language at school, whenever they are directly asked. One obstacle (among others) may be the conception young children have about language, as we see with this group: children give some words in a foreign language, even though sometimes they do not identify the language. They see the language as a word collection. Maybe the four-years old Turkish speaker does not associate 'knowing a language' with 'speaking', a complex linguistic gesture.

Such a situation can also be embarrassing for the bilingual child and can remind her/him of one feature of ELCO[27] when this teaching took place within school time. Taking account of a specificity might be discriminatory, and might isolate a pupil. Any situation that transforms an individual specificity into a tool for the group might be preferable.

Primary school situation (9-10 years old)

An individual or group specificity can be considered a contribution to raising the culture of the whole class. Family languages will not then be seen as one child's specific feature, but as part of the class's feature. The following example is a language awareness activity; the children have been studying English at school for six months[28]. Eight children speak Maghreb Arabic at home; they have been studying classic Arabic (written) for two months. They have no particular problems at school, and they are good at English. But during number dictation, they write the unit figure in front of the ten figure, as when read aloud in Arabic (for example, when the number '34' is read out as 'four-and thirty', it is written down as 43). The teacher fears that learning two new languages simultaneously might disturb the children, and builds a session about German, with two aims:

[22] in English
[23] in English
[24] in English
[25] in English
[26] in English
[27] Family Language and Culture Teaching, launched in France in the late seventies.
[28] Forty five minutes twice a week.

- to have all the children compare two languages, English and German;
- to provide the Arabic speakers with a tool to think about numbers writing.

First the teacher gives German numbers from one to ten, plus fifteen, with visual help. The pupils compare English and German and notice similar sounds. Then the teacher dictates the numbers without visual help, known numbers first, then new numbers: the children have to compare new numbers with known numbers to be able to find out their meanings. This stage (listening, thinking and debating) lasts sixteen minutes. German numbers were used because, as in Arabic, the unit figure is given orally before the tens figure (34 is 'drei und viersig').

Secondly, the children are asked to individually write down what they think about the numbers in the three languages for eight minutes. At the end of this stage, the Arabic speakers and a Spanish speaker ask if they may teach the class numbers in Arabic and in Spanish. Five out of eight children participate in this five-minute spontaneous teaching, and explain the respective position of each figure (units and tens) in the written and oral versions.

The children thoroughly appreciated this lesson. Such an activity involved the whole group: family languages were not considered as some strange peculiarities, but as useful tools for everyone. They contributed to the common culture of the class.

Welcoming the school-yard culture

Children have their own oral culture, which Opie has studied in England. In a class of 9-year olds, the teacher taught the children a tongue-twister (in French) and asked them to bring others. One child suggests 'tu monteras des cendres et descendras mon thé'[29].

C: It is the same, it is like syllables and we always repeat the same thing twice but it doesn't mean the same thing
I : You repeat the same thing, but it does not mean the same thing; that is when you say we repeat the same thing, please be precise
V: We can hear 'montera des cendres' and 'descendre monter' sort of
I: We can hear hum, we can hear the same sounds then
C: Yes
I: But it's not the same, that is
V: It's not, it does not mean the same then, yes
I : It does not mean the same, could someone try to go a bit further

The debate about this classical tongue-twister demonstrates the links between sound and meaning. Welcoming the playground culture can legitimate the children's oral culture, which is a very efficient language teaching tool, present both at home and at school.

[29] A word-cutting tongue-twister, about the equivalent of 'who did Dracula marry? the girl necks door'

Recognising family languages and contexts

Here is an extract of an interview: three adults[30] are talking to three pupils[31] at the end of a language workshop.

I:	Do you find the debate workshop useful? Is debating useful out of school?
Boy:	I use debate out of school. My pals, they are in favour of war in Iraq, now I can try to convince them, I can argue with them
I:	Do you tell your parents about the workshop, at home?
One girl:	Yes, I do
The second girl:	I tell my aunt what a debate is.
Boy:	No. It's pointless, since my parents don't speak French.
I:	Your parents speak Arabic, don't they?
Boy:	Yes they do
I:	Well, they debate in Arabic
Boy (very firmly):	No they don't.

Baylon studies the 'subjective status' of a speaker (Baylon, 1996, p.90): an individual might choose a 'reference group' and adopt its linguistic norms even if he/she does not belong to the group. The group might be considered positive or negative according to the social part s/he is playing within it. The boy in the extract identified several social groups to which he belongs: the school, the street group, the family. When he is with the street group and is arguing about war in Iraq, he considers school as a positive referring group. When he is at home, he considers school as a negative referring group, since there is no debate, according to him.

It may be, as is frequently thought, that his family is not giving him the necessary help to acquire language; but it is also possible that the boy is not saying 'the family language does not help at school', but 'the school language is no use at home, but very useful with friends'.

He seems to have a negative image of his family ('my parents do not debate'); not finding at home a language pattern he is very positive about. He appears to be more diglot than bilingual: that is, he uses Arabic and French in different circumstances, and he seems to give more endorsement to French than to Arabic. But again we need to be careful: his appraisal of a language workshop, at school, with three teachers, reveals at least a socio-linguistic skill. And given the teachers' often negative point of view about dialects mentioned above, we should consider how far these attitudes can affect some children's self esteem.

[30] One teacher and two researchers: none of them is known to the children

[31] Two girls are nine years old, one boy is ten years old ; their school is having language workshops: debating, arguing, interviewing, reporting.

Conclusion

Several stages exist between diglottism and bilingualism, which would allow the use of both languages in all circumstances, with all groups, about every topic. To give pupils a means of achieving real bilingualism, we should give them the tools to link the different linguistic and cultural worlds they live in, to bridge the gaps. One such tool would be recognising the value and the status of the family language.

Teachers should not develop specific attitudes towards bilingual children: they should instead analyse their own linguistic biographies, their conceptions of languages, and work out teaching attitudes towards all the children; this could allow pupils' potentialities to develop more easily.

References

Baylon, Christian (1996) *Sociolinguistique, société, langue et discourse*. Paris: Nathan.

Calvet Louis-Jean (1999) *Pour une écologie des langues du monde*. Paris: Plon.

Cerguiglini, Bernard (ed) (2003) *Les langues de France*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Darras, Jacques (2001) *Qui parle l'européen ? L'Europe dans la contrainte des langues nationales.* Bruxelles: Le Cri.

Gajo, Laurent (2001) *Immersion, bilinguisme et interaction en classe*. Paris Didier- Langues et apprentissage des langues.

Poche, Bernard (2000) *Les langues minoritaires en Europe*. Grenoble: Presse Universitaire de Grenoble Transeurope