LANGUAGES AND IMMIGRATION

Raising Awareness of Language and Linguistic Diversity in Schools

ABSTRACT

In a context of immigration and plurilingualism, language proficiency and the presence of an accent, likeother visible markers of difference, can be used for social promotion, but can also give rise to discrimination based on negative representations of the languages and the speakers of those languages.

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Like most major metropolises around the world that attract immigrants, Montréal and Vancouver enjoy a vast cultural and linguistic diversity, and there are many students of immigrant origin who are educated in a language other than their mother tongue(s). In 2002, for instance, 34.9% of students in Montréal schools had a first language other than English or French. In total, 189 different first languages were represented, out of the approximately 6,000 languages worldwide (Comité de gestion de la taxe scolaire de l'île de Montréal, 2003). According to the 2001 census, students learning English as a second language made up 53% of school populations in the greater Vancouver area, where many Aboriginal languages, such as Coast Salish, still exist (Shaw 2001).

In a context of immigration and plurilingualism, language proficiency and the presence of an accent, like other visible markers of difference, can be used for social promotion, but can also give rise to discrimination based on negative representations of the languages and the speakers of those languages. Calvet (2002) underscores the existence, in the context of globalization, of a sort of language market wherein languages may depreciate, be devalued or rise in value. According to Moore (1994), languages are substantially more than objective, socially neutral tools for transmitting sound; they are deeply connected to their users, specifically to the prestige that they afford and to the types of contacts that they may provide.

Encouraging and promoting an inclusive Canadian society, underscored by the 1969 *Official Languages Act* and the 1988 Multiculturalism Policy, involves implementing policies, programs and practices that foster intercultural understanding. More specifically, it requires assisting in the creation of positive relationships that value and recognize both cultural and linguistic diversity. In a recent policy paper, *Education in a Multilingual World* (2003), UNESCO states that it "supports language as an essential component of inter-cultural education in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights" (p. 30).

The Québec education department's Policy Statement on Educational Integration and Intercultural Education (1998) highlights the significance of learning to live together in a francophone, democratic and pluralistic society. It also indicates that all staff must develop an attitude of openness to ethnocultural, linguistic and religious diversity, as well as skills to include pluralism in the education system. The policy's sixth guideline suggests that Québec's heritage and shared values, specifically openness to ethnocultural, linguistic and religious diversity, must be reflected in the curriculum and school life. Consequently, the creation of citizenship courses and the teaching of third languages in high school are being promoted.

The British Columbia Ministry of Education's Language Education Policy encourages opportunities for all students to learn languages that are significant within their communities (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 3). Furthermore, the Ministry's Diversity Framework Policy (2003) highlights the need to develop a curriculum based on social justice that rejects Eurocentrism and recognizes the experiences and contributions of various groups in society. The policy recommends that educational activities take into account the diversity of citizens, improve access to equality, foster civic responsibility and promote antiracism. The province's professional body responsible for teacher certification requires teachers to be trained in multiculturalism, antiracism, the immigrant experience and the diversity of their students' linguistic origins (British Columbia College of Teachers, 2002).

To our knowledge, neither intercultural education nor citizenship education in Montréal and Vancouver have addressed linguistic diversity. In Europe, such methods have been developed through the implementation of programs, including Language Awareness and *Éveil aux langues*.

Éveil aux langues

The purpose of the Language Awareness approach, which appeared in Great Britain in the early 1980s and was developed by Hawkins (1987) and his team, was to foster the development of positive representations and attitudes toward openness to linguistic and cultural diversity, metalinguistic abilities to facilitate the transition from first to second languages, and language-related knowledge, including language status. In the 1990s, that approach was renamed *Éveil au langage*, then *Éveil aux langues*, and was subsequently adopted in Europe under the *Evlang* (Candelier, 2003) and *Eole* (Perregaux et al., 2003) programs. The main goal of these educational activities is to allow students to systematically explore linguistic diversity in order to prepare them to live in linguistically and culturally diverse societies.

Éveil aux langues basics

This approach is based on trends in sociolinguistics, linguistics and ethnography in an effort to address the issue of constructing representations specific to language among students and teachers. The concept of representation has been a heuristic tool for studying children's interactions in situations of plurilingualism and of contact with a number of languages in the school setting. It has helped describe how students position themselves in relation to others in their speech and to identify their representations of languages, of speakers of those languages and of learning those languages (Moore 2001). It requires a close study of the stereotypical representations made in children's speech, as well as an examination of how language awareness activities may change those representations and enable students to become open to diversity and to adequately construct their identity.

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Recent studies on the construction of that identity are based on a poststructural theory (Pavlenko, 2001), which stipulates that identity is dynamic and multiple and that learners use speech to establish their social position in the group (Dagenais 2003; Heller 2000; Norton 2000). These studies show how the learner's position in interactions either grants him or her access to or excludes him or her from social networks, depending on the positive or negative representations associated with the learner's identity. The connections between learning languages, linguistic diversity and constructing identities are addressed by the critical study of power relationships between individuals, as well as their representation of themselves and of others.

Research on implementing the *Éveil aux langues* approach strives to describe children's language practices, with a particular focus on representations of bilingualism and/or plurilingualism, language learning, plurilingual identities and relationships with various linguistic communities developed by students and teachers.

Research in psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology provides the theoretical basis for developing metalinguistic or reflection-based skills in relation to language. According to French researcher Gombert (1992), those metalinguistic skills encompass the subject's ability to consider different units of speech (phoneme, word, phrase, text) as items for analysis and as a reflection that he or she can control through intentional manipulation. Under *Éveil aux langues* programs, attentive listening of linguistic corpora in different languages, reflections on linguistic borrowings between languages and comparisons of types of negation in different languages all help develop such metalinguistic skills. In addition to simply acquiring language-related knowledge, the learner becomes an observer of the mechanics of language and of languages themselves, and, to borrow an expression from Brédart and Rondal (1982), he or she becomes a "linguiste en herbe" [budding linguist]. Many studies have shown that these metalinguistic skills, specifically phonology and syntax, are linked to successful reading and writing in both the first and second languages and are, therefore, determining factors in educational and professional success (Armand, 2000; Chiappe and Siegel, 1999; Gombert, 1992; Lefrançois and Armand, 2003).

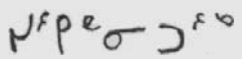
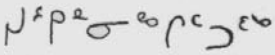
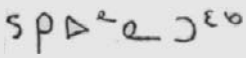
Results of implementing language awareness programs in Europe

European research shows that language awareness fosters positive representations of linguistic diversity and long-term development of metalinguistic skills for teachers and students – especially for the weaker members of the school population – specifically in the areas of memorization and auditory discrimination in unfamiliar languages (Candelier, 2003; Sabatier, 2002).

The ELODiL project in Canada

Based on European research, Armand and Dagenais (2003–2004, study supported by the Metropolis Project and by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) / multiculturalism project)[1] conducted their first comparative study, which led them to adapt these teaching approaches to the Canadian education system and to implement ELODiL [language awareness and openness to linguistic diversity]. A number of autonomous or computer-based (multimedia) activity modules were developed or adapted from the *Evlang* or *Eole* programs for use in grade five and six classrooms. They were then posted on a Web site (www.elodil.com) in order to make the project available to more teachers. The activities were tested in various classrooms in Montréal and Vancouver during the 2003–2004 school year. The basic purpose of that initial study was to determine whether elementary school students develop critical knowledge of linguistic diversity by participating in language awareness activities. That effort is continuing under a new research project subsidized by the SSHRC

Instructions: Try to write "Il ne fait pas froid" in Inuktitut, first in printing and then using the original writing system.

French	Inuktitut	French	Inuktitut
Il y a du soleil	Siqinnituq 	Il n'y a pas de soleil	Siqinningittuq 
Frenchs	**Inuktitut**	**French**	**Inuktitut**
Il fait froid	Qiunnatuq 	Il ne fait pas froid	*(see Web site for correct answer)*

(2005–2008; Dagenais, Armand, Lamarre, Moore and Sabatier) and is being developed for preschool students as well (2005–2007, Armand, de Koninck and Kanouté, Montréal Immigration and Metropolis Research Centre).

Examples of language awareness activities

In the first activity of the *Bonjour* module, students watch a video in which children say "hello" in 17 different languages. They have to try to identify the language of each of those "hellos" and the country or countries in which that language is spoken. Concepts such as official language and national language are addressed and discussed. The activity's preparatory phase provides an opportunity to gain a wareness of linguistic diversity worldwide. A number of key figures are mentioned, such as the number of languages spoken in the world, on the Island of Montréal, in Vancouver and in the student's school. Students may continue their learning on their own through a multimedia activity that uses the same principle but goes into considerably more depth concerning the number of languages and countries.

In one of the activities in the *La fleur des langues* [the language flower] tool, students are introduced to concepts such as mother tongue, second language and foreign language. They study a video montage in which two children tell their linguistic life stories (What languages do they speak? With whom? What is or are their mother tongue(s), second language(s), etc.?). The students then tell their own linguistic life stories using the terms "monolingual," "bilingual" and "plurilingual." Afterwards, they illustrate their stories on flower petals and the individual petals are assembled to form the class's language flower.

In two activities of the *La pluie et le beau temps* [rain or shine] module, students use dialogues recorded in four languages to identify the negation markers and the differences in the formation of that negation in French, Malagasy, Haitian Creole and Spanish (activity A, adapted from *Evlang*, Réunion team, 2002). They then use analysis of those corpora or other corpora to form a negative sentence, such as the Inuktitut sentence below (activity B).

Preliminary results of the first test study of ELODiL activities in Montréal and Vancouver

The activities were implemented in 2003–2004 in grade five and six classes in Montréal, an immersion class in Vancouver, and two regular and two newcomer classes (French classes for new immigrants) in a pluriethnic Montréal school. Qualitative data were collected in the form of notes taken on-site, audio and video recordings of classroom interactions and interviews with students.

Preliminary analysis of those data has led to a few observations: students critically discuss the different values given to languages and to their speakers in society; children of diverse linguistic origins are repositioned (and reposition themselves) as language experts in classroom interactions; in group activities, students pool their linguistic knowledge (French, English and heritage languages) to make sense of unknown languages and to build a representation of that language together; children interpret language diversity in relation to their linguistic landscape and their contact with different linguistic groups; and participation in such activities will likely encourage the development of reflective skills in the area of languages.

Conclusion

Language awareness programs fall under intercultural and citizenship education practices by fostering the development of civic skills (Lamarre, 2002). Preparing tomorrow's citizens to take their place in democratic society requires analytical skills and an understanding of current social realities surrounding the issue of languages and of the effect of representations on languages and their speakers. A twinning strategy between language awareness and critical education (Fairclough, 1992) could raise awareness among future citizens of the inequality of languages and speakers of those languages, change their linguistic representations and define the conditions for advancement, in a migrating and plurilingual world, toward equality between men and women in the area of languages and communication.

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Note

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