Chapter 10


Ya Rao
Paul Valery University, France

Congcong Wang
University of Northern Iowa, USA

Jacob Bender
University of Iowa, USA

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores how a French-Chinese web collaborative blog-writing project provides a space for understanding the various metalinguistic approaches that foreign language learners’ use to facilitate foreign language learning and intercultural communication. It adopts a multilingual-plurilingual approach, an interlingual approach and a web collaboration approach as a framework. Qualitative data was collected from the blogs and online interactions of 22 French Foreign Language (FFL) learners in China, and 24 Chinese Foreign Language (CFL) learners in France. The findings reveal the increased development of FFL and CFL learners’ metalinguistic awareness, plurilingual competence, and bilingual skills that is accomplished through web collaboration. Implications regarding web-based tandem language learning and peer-assisted web collaboration are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Prior to 2000, language education in European countries was primarily focused on the study of one’s maternal language and English. But post-2000, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, now known as the Council of Europe, 2001) proposed that all language learners
should possess plurilingual skills and be given opportunities to interact with a growing and increasingly culturally diverse population. Armand and Dagenais (2005) stress that recent foreign language education should focus on systematically preparing students to become bilingual or multilingual stakeholders in their personal lives and fields, as well as in a local-global context. Due to a renewed respect for foreign and regional languages learning, interest in multiculturalism and multilingualism increased (Filippetti, 2014). Thus, plurilingual competence has since become a major goal of language education in Europe.

To help learners develop plurilingual competence, plurilingual environments and pluralistic opportunities are important, which assist learners to develop linguistic and cultural sensibilities and awareness. In the development of plurilingual and pluralist competencies, metalinguistic awareness is central to foreign language learning (Ildikó, 2005). Mediating the gap between the target language and mother tongue, metalinguistic awareness enables learners to discover knowledge about both language practices and systems comparatively. However, the literature shows that metalinguistic awareness has been understudied within tandem and bilingual learning contexts (Reder, Marec-Breton, Gombert, & Demont, 2013). Therefore, this qualitative study explores how French Foreign Language (FFL) learners and Chinese Foreign Language (CFL) learners develop plurilingual competence and metalinguistic awareness through web collaborations.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Plurilingual Competence**

Plurilingual competence refers to the ability to manage multiple language codes in communication, according to the need or necessity of the situation (Coste, Moore, and Zarate; 2009). It is associated with the learner’s ability to gather, juggle, connect, and manage his/her language repertoire by understanding bits and pieces of one language, and modify as well as build new languages based on prior knowledge (Coste, 2001). Plurilingual competence reflects how individuals utilize multiple language resources to mediate their communication in a new language situation, as well as consider the social appropriateness of language use (Moore, 2006; Pretceille, 2006). A learner’s negotiation and management of coexisting different language and culture systems contributes to the construction of a constantly renewed repertoire. Therefore, the development of plurilingual and pluricultural competence requires learners to have a broad vision between the different systems of languages and cultures. Teaching plurilingualism can be closely tied to students’ metalinguistic awareness (Candelier, 2008).

Based on reflexivity and metalinguistic awareness, a pluralist approach can be recognized and conducted by the learner during language activities in a school context (Ildikó, 2005). Pluralistic approaches refer to activities involving multiple linguistic and cultural varieties across and within languages. Geographical and organizational differences exist among these linguistic and cultural varieties, e.g., regional languages, standardized official languages, and Creoles. Social characteristics of language are related to personal contexts, such as family language versus school language. The goal of pluralist approaches is to develop a metalinguistic awareness, as well as metalanguage skills for each individual learner (Castelloti Moore 2005). However, some learners who try to master two or more languages simultaneously may encounter linguistic and sociolinguistic difficulties if they lack plurilingual competence.

This pluralist approach differs from the traditional learning or teaching model wherein a language seems to be an autonomous and separated system. On the contrary, when learners interact and work