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INNOVATIVE FEATURES OF A PLURILINGUAL APPROACH IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: IMPLICATIONS FROM THE LINCDIRE PROJECT

Abstract:

Language teaching methodologies over the past decade have been gradually moving towards plurilingual approaches (Conteh & Meier, 2014; Lau & Van Viegen, 2020; May, 2014; Taylor & Snoddon, 2013). The multi/plurilingual turn in language education marks the move from language separation to integration of languages in the classroom. In turn, this has been accompanied by the emergence of innovative action-oriented and task-based approaches (Piccardo & North, 2019; Piccardo et al., in press; van den Branden, et al, 2009). These important developments may raise ambivalent responses, especially in contexts embracing more traditional approaches to language teaching. To address this ambivalence, this article aims to present the successes of a plurilingual action-oriented approach (LINCDIRE) and outline its innovative features. We present data from a multiphase, mixed methods research study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) involving 140 participants (25 teachers; 115 students, including elementary, high school, and adult students) from a range of culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms represented by nine languages, all in North American educational contexts. Our research builds on a broad view of mediation that encompasses the Vygotskian concept (Lantolf et al., 2015), expanded through an embodied and enactive view of cognition (Love, 2014) and the cyclical intersubjective process that characterizes human agency (Piccardo, in press; Raimondi, 2014). LINCDIRE takes into account a set of recently developed mediation descriptors (Council of Europe, 2020) and provides both a conceptual and practical frame for the innovative action-oriented tasks, connection of language and culture, and integration of online and in-class learning via a digital e-portfolio LITE (Language

Integration Through E-portfolio). Finally, we discuss implications from the LINCDIRE project for teachers, administrators, and policymakers.

Keywords: Pedagogical innovation ◆ plurilingualism ◆ pluriculturalism ◆ action-oriented tasks ◆ mediation

Introduction

Since the dawn of colonialism, English has been one of the languages of power, first imperial and then economic (Kuppens, 2013; Majhanovich, 2014). Its apparently simple grammatical structure and its openness to incorporating new terms have meant that English is favored in today's globalized world. English as the predominant language is perceived as giving access to better jobs, greater incomes, more opportunity for mobility and integration in the global market.

However, the dominant position of English implies the superiority of Anglo-American culture, ideology, and models over others in multiple ways, especially in aspects such as education, ways of thinking, analytical methods, critical judgment, relationship to the world, and ways of being (Phillipson, 2018). In turn, this perceived superiority further strengthens the gap between English and other modern languages,[1] these being increasingly seen as superfluous. This trend risks leading to the extinction of linguistic and cultural diversity (Kramsch, 2017). Furthermore, in today's culturally and linguistically heterogeneous classrooms, English hegemony policies may create an unequal relationship between those for whom English is the first language and other students, whose self-esteem, identity, and future possibilities may be affected (Lin & Kubota, 2009; Norton & McKinney, 2011). As a study conducted by Duff (2002) shows, non-native students often prefer to remain silent in a language classroom and not participate in activities in order to protect themselves from humiliation and criticism, a silence often interpreted by their native English classmates as lack of motivation, interest, and initiative. Participation and non-participation in social interactions and negotiations in the classroom both play a crucial role in forming identities (Norton & McKinney, 2011) and in a broader sense can maintain injustice and inequality within the community (Kubota & Lin, 2009).

In this context, based on scientific research results into the language learning process, many scholars argue for the benefits of plurilingual approaches in the language classroom (Choi & Ollerhead, 2018; Conteh & Meier, 2014; Lau & Van Viegen, 2020; May, 2014; Taylor & Snoddon, 2013) from different perspectives and suggest transformative resources and attitudes in language education policies and classroom activities (Piccardo & North, 2019; Piccardo et al., in press ; van den Branden et al., 2009). However, the gap persists between research findings

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[1] By modern languages we mean languages that are currently in use, as opposed to classical languages (e.g., Latin, Ancient Greek).

and implementation of plurilingual[2]/pluricultural pedagogies in classrooms, especially in contexts embracing more traditional monopolicies approaches to language teaching. Plurilingual approaches are still used in only a very limited way in curricula due to the gap between theory and implementation and teacher uncertainty about appropriate ways to apply it.

To address this ambivalence, this article aims to answer the following questions:

- How can innovative features[3] of a plurilingual approach inform the teaching of modern languages in English-dominant classrooms, especially in the North American context?

- What role does mediation play in language teaching within the plurilingual approach?

We introduce plurilingualism in language education as well as the concept of mediation from different perspectives. This is followed by the theoretical framework that informed the Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Reinvented (LINCDIRE)[4] project, an international research project that aimed to support and study the implementation of an action-oriented plurilingual approach in classes of second/foreign languages. Data from the project are then presented and a discussion of implications from the project for teachers, administrators, and policy-makers concludes the article.

Plurilingualism and Innovation in the Second Language Classroom

Pedagogical innovation in language teaching

Language teaching methodology has gradually moved from language separation to a meaningful integration of languages, as opposed to the monolingual bias (Cummins, 2000; May, 2014; Ortega, 2019; Pavlenko, 2005) or "parallel monolingualism" (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; Heller, 1999) inscribed in conventional methodologies. Examples of plurilingual methodology include: intercomprehension (De Carlo & Garbarino, forthcoming; Meißner, 2011), intercultural approaches (Byram, 2010), metalinguistic awareness activities (Dressler et al., 2011; Marx & Mehlhorn, 2010; Woll, 2018), mediation activities (CoE, 2020; Liddicoat,

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[2] The notion of plurilingualism views languages as interrelated and interconnected, especially at the individual level. Instead of the focus on the advanced mastery of each language, it emphasizes the dynamic nature of language use and partial linguistic competence (CoE, 2001). Plurilingualism differs from the concept of multilingualism to the extent that multilingualism is understood as a notion, which views languages as separate or co-existing at the societal level. On an individual level, multilingualism emphasizes the speaker's mastery of each language.

[3] In this context, we use the term "innovative" to refer to particular features of our project (e.g. "scenarios and action-oriented tasks, interconnected plurilingual and pluricultural components, and integrated online and in-class learning through LITE" [https://lite.lincdireproject.org/]), which have not been used before or have not been used in such a combination.

[4] https://www.lincdireproject.org/

2014; North & Piccardo, 2016; Piccardo, 2012, forthcoming), and translanguaging approaches (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011, 2017; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García et al., 2017; Li, 2018).

The paradigmatic shift towards plurilingualism in language education has been accompanied by the emergence of innovative an action-oriented approach (AoA[5]) and task-based teaching[6] (Piccardo et al., in press; Piccardo & North, 2019; van den Branden et al., 2009). A growing number of empirical studies of plurilingualism as an alternative pedagogy have focused on action-oriented and task-based plurilingual initiatives in teaching modern languages (e.g., French, German) in K-12 sectors (e.g., Ballinger, 2013; Faez et al. 2011a, 2011b; Prasad, 2013, 2014; Taylor, 2015; Woll, 2018). For example, Faez et al. (2011a, 2011b) report on French as a second language (FSL) teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards using instruction informed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (CoE, 2001), which proposed the AoA, in K-12 schools in Ontario, Canada for a period of three months. Both quantitative (Faez et al., 2011a) and qualitative (Faez et al., 2011b) results of the study reveal teachers' general optimism about the applicability of the AoA and its perceived contribution to student motivation, self-confidence, authentic language use, and learner autonomy. In Quebec, Ballinger (2013) reports on a cross-linguistic intervention in two elementary French immersion schools where the students were involved in collaborative tasks in a biliteracy project that linked the content in English and French language arts, which enhanced students' utilization of reciprocal learning strategies (e.g., providing and seeking peer feedback) and peer collaboration. In a German as a third language context, Woll's (2018) study affirms a positive relationship between metalinguistic awareness and positive transfer from students' L2 (French) to L3 (German). All these studies provide valuable insights into the benefits of tapping into the complexity, fluidity, and dynamics among the multiple languages existing in a plurilingual individual's linguistic repertoire.

Another strand of research has focused on the level of postsecondary education. For example, in Alvarez and Perez-Cavana's (2015) study which involved nine European universities, the instructors and students perceived that the task-based learning experience helped them develop self-awareness of the possibilities of plurilingual communication. In Canada, researchers have explored plurilingual pedagogies in both disciplinary content and academic English classrooms. Marshall (2020), for instance, examines instructors' varied understandings of students'

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[5] Action-oriented Approach (AoA) refers to a language education approach that draws on active real-life oriented use of language in pedagogy and assessment, taking into account a broad spectrum of resources (cognitive, emotional and volitional) beyond the learning of linguistic aspects only, and focus on the full range of abilities of the unique individual learner as a social agent (CEFR, 2001).
[6] Task-based approach is considered a further development of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and it refers to an approach based on the use of real life and meaningful tasks as the central organizing principle of planning and instruction in language teaching.

plurilingual practices and pedagogical strategies across different disciplines. Similarly, Van Viegen and Zappa-Hollman (2020) explore different types of plurilingual pedagogies ("intentional" versus "spontaneous") in disciplinary content areas in two Canadian universities and call for a shift "from teaching based on monoglossic to heteroglossic ideologies" (p. 176). These results are echoed in the domain of academic English classrooms. As Chen's (2018) study of three academic English programs shows, instructors shared varied perceptions of international students' plurilingualism, ranging from deficit to asset, while some are already starting plurilingualism-oriented pedagogical actions, albeit in a sporadic manner. Furthermore, Galante's (2018) quasi-experimental study suggests that plurilingual instruction is more effective than monolingual instruction.

Overall, the emerging literature on plurilingual initiatives indicates the promise of plurilingual pedagogy across K-16 sectors; however, most studies in the research literature focus on English language classrooms and far fewer studies focus on second or heritage language classrooms in English dominant contexts. Our project aims to make a contribution by including other language classrooms, such as heritage and other second/foreign languages in addition to ESL classes; it is the data from these other language classrooms that we focus on in this paper.

Teacher resistance towards innovation

While researchers are generally enthusiastic about the developments in plurilingualism-inspired approaches, teachers have varied attitudes towards innovation, often accompanied by some resistance or ambivalence. The reasons for teachers' dilemmas often involve individual language beliefs, pervasive public discourses, and lack of support for plurilingual pedagogical innovations.

First of all, teachers' perceptions of the compatibility between innovation and individual beliefs and teaching practices turns out to be a primary challenge (Tinker Sachs, 2007). Ogilvie and Dunn (2010) point out that the focus on explicit linguistic content of conventional teaching methods has "contributed to an intuitive understanding of language learning as developing in the same manner as other skills, such as learning to drive a car or hit a tennis ball" (p. 163). Teacher resistance to change may also be due to beliefs influenced by their own learning experiences (East, 2017; van den Branden, 2009). The second challenge is the influence of prevailing discourses that position students' plurilingualism more as a problem than as an asset. Taylor (2015) suggests that even teachers who endorse the philosophical stance of new approaches and welcome changes can experience challenges as "macro-level societal conditions and expectations inherent in micro-level educational structures may be incompatible with the accommodations educators need to successfully implement innovations" (p. 515). Along the same lines, Abiria et al.'s (2013) study reveals that the monolingual disposition is

ingrained in pre/in-service teacher training and perpetuated in curriculum and assessment. This leads to the last, yet perhaps most important, aspect in any pedagogical innovation, namely, pedagogical innovations require structural and systematic support, especially continuous professional development opportunities. Faez et al. (2011a) purports the two major barriers for teachers are time constraints and lack of understanding of the nature and classroom applicability of plurilingual innovations. While language teachers nowadays are increasingly aware of the benefits of including students' L1(s) in the classroom, their everyday dilemmas are often tied to a lack of the necessary knowledge and skills regarding how to effectively incorporate students' plurilingual resources (Chen, 2020). This points to an urgent need for researcher-teacher collaboration which could leverage both theoretical and practitioner knowledge for professional conversations and meaningful professional growth (Maloney & Konza, 2011; Stoll et al., 2006).

Mediational Plurilingualism as a Theoretical Framework

The need to move beyond a reductive view of language learning as the simple faxing of information from one person to the other (Orman, 2013) and as linear correspondence of meaning across languages (Harris, 1981) calls for wider, more systemic theories and ecological-semiotic perspectives (van Lier, 2004). It also implies the adoption of a rich conceptual framework able to stress the active role of learners seen as social agents engaged in a process of co-construction of knowledge. The LINCDIRE project adopted a theoretical framework built around mediation and the related concepts of affordances, agency, and (pluri)languaging (Piccardo, 2017). Used in diplomacy and conflict resolution to commercial and personal transactions, professional arbitration, and counselling, mediation has been interpreted in various ways. In language acquisition, mediation has been given center stage by different theories based upon the work of Vygotsky (e.g., sociocultural theory, socio-constructivist theory). For Vygotsky (1978), cognition develops through social interaction with higher mental functions having a social origin and nature (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014; Wertsch, 1985) and is mediated by psychological and cultural tools, especially language. For Vygotsky social activity—and with it, the different forms of social and cultural mediation—precedes the emergence of concepts. The act of mediation is core to cognition: for Vygotsky "mental activity […] is mediated; at a human level it is only possible thanks to the artificial means used to structure and modify it" (Schneuwly, 2008, p. 16 authors' translation); in fact, mediation of human thinking develops as "internalization of socially constructed activity" (Lantolf, 2007, p. 693). Individuals reconstruct for themselves the mediated social interactions that they have experienced. Language emerges from social interaction and later becomes the object of reflection, when learners internalise processes such as thought or learning.

Besides Vygotsky's theories, the non-linearity of the learning process and the core role of mediation in the process also inform other theories and models. The ecological model (van Lier 2004) and complexity theories (de Bot, 2016; de Bot et al., 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2017; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) also see the teaching and learning process as emerging from the action of learners seen as social agents who are actively engaged in the (co)construction of their knowledge and (co)development of their cognition.

Building on various psychological theories and the philosophy of language and semiotics, van Lier underlies the importance of exposing learners to "affordances," which he defines as "meaningful ways of relating to the environment through perception-in-action" (van Lier 2002, p. 147). This goes beyond reasoning in terms of input or output. Only with these affordances do learners have the possibility to embrace the complexity that the process of learning and using a new language inevitably implies. Engaging in a form of situated action and cognition allows learners to overcome the classic binary view of language as an entity on one side, and language use as the implementation of that entity on the other, to abandon the language myth (Harris, 1981), or the view of a language as "an inventory of determinately identifiable linguistic units, each of which correlates a form with a meaning or meanings" (Love, 2004, p. 529). With Harris' integrational view (2000), language is seen as "a second-order cultural construct, perpetually open-ended and incomplete, arising out of the first-order activity of making and interpreting linguistic signs, which in turn is a real-time, contextually determined process of investing behaviour or the products of behaviour (vocal, gestural or other) with semiotic significance" (Love, 2014, p. 530). This view stresses the situated, negotiated, and evolving nature of language and communication, and allows us to move from the noun *language* to the verb *languaging,* the form of social agency able to negotiate between interactive and self-directed meta-regulation linguistic sense-making" (Cuffari et al., 2015, p. 1110).

Language is a social activity, "a mode of socially extended cognition" (Fusaroli et al., 2014, p. 32); it is not just a vehicle of symbolic thought that already exists but is in fact part of the thinking process itself. Thus, "linguistic patterns enable the cognitive agent to construct, rely upon and manipulate 'cognitive niches': regularities, affordances and constraints that shape and support cognitive processes" (2014, pp. 32-33). One excellent way to encourage agency and to expose learners to affordances is the completion of (complex) tasks (Piccardo, 2012) which involve the mediation of mental processes at various levels. In this way, learners are social agents who perceive affordances as invitations to act (Kaüfer & Chemero, 2015). This in turn enables the mediational meaning-making process which is core to learning. As van Lier reminds us, "[a]n action-based approach … makes agency, rather than the particular curricular organisation, the defining construct" (2007, p. 46).

The possibilities that affordances represent are even richer in number and quality in the case of a plurality of languages and cultures. Acknowledging linguistic diversity by supporting the learning of languages in a plurilingual, action-oriented way encourages learners to respond to all affordances (linguistic, cultural, cognitive, emotional, etc.) that they perceive as relevant to their learning process. Plurilingualism, the flexible and dynamic use of the whole individual linguistic repertoire (Piccardo, 2018; Beacco & Byram, 2007; Coste, 2014; Lüdi, 2019) can greatly foster awareness and agency, thus increasing the possibility of perceiving affordances as invitations to act. Negotiating the inevitable ambiguities linked to navigating multiple languages implies mediation at all levels and the ability to embrace phases of chaos in the process of (co)-constructing learning. Learners exert their agency by not ignoring or erasing linguistic and conceptual differences and ambiguities, but rather consciously dealing with them to boost their awareness and learning process. This dynamic process of construction of knowledge within and across languages is an enriched form of languaging, it is in fact a form of *plurilanguaging* (Piccardo, 2017; Piccardo, 2018; Lüdi, 2014), a term which better captures the complex and dynamic positioning and agency of plurilingual individuals.

For the theoretical framework to inform pedagogy, specific descriptors for mediation and for plurilingual/pluricultural competence have been developed in the *Common European Framework of Reference Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020) (CEFRCV) within a large international project of the Council of Europe (CoE). The conceptual model developed in the project highlights how "cognitive mediation" of each individual forms a part of the broader "social (relational) dimension", therefore the development of individual cognition is enabled and nurtured through "the web of collective intelligence" (Piccardo, in press). The CEFRCV document considers users/learners as social agents, who take part in social life and carry out everyday tasks (e.g., buy things, participate in conversations), and use signs to mediate such activities. Subsequently, such signs are interiorized and structure cognitive processes of users (Piccardo & North, 2019).

Action-oriented scenarios[7] and tasks provide the frame within which affordances can foster the languaging and plurilanguaging process. These scenarios can represent a rich "landscape of affordances" (Gallagher et al., 2017; Rietveld & Kiverstein, 2014), thus supporting the emerging mediated, social, and cognitive process of learning languages. Scenarios can also be the key to operationalizing mediation in the class in order to foster plurilingual and pluricultural education (Piccardo, 2014; Bourguignon, 2010) because they allow for the activation of scripts

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[7] The term "scenario" is used as a broader concept than "task" to refer to the overall description of the activities and sub-tasks students will do in a real-life situation (Piccardo & North, 2019). Typically, a scenario reflects (a) the teaching and learning objectives, (b) an overview of the situation, (c) the smaller steps (sub-tasks) as well as a culminating task (the final task), and (d) creation of some form of artefact. Examples of the scenarios are available on the LITE website.

that draw on linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic competences by engaging learners in authentic, real-world situations with a specific goal with conditions and constraints and the need to make choices. In scenarios, learners are social agents: real people exerting their agency in realistic contexts. As frames for projects, scenarios contain one (or more) culminating action-oriented task(s) that provide the necessary coherence, since learners are working towards a precise goal: the creation of some form of artefact. For example, in the scenario *Let's go for dinner* (level B1), learners invite their best friend, who is visiting their city but does not speak English, to a Friday dinner. They need to search for a restaurant online and find a place where they can order a drink, a starter, a main course, and a dessert, for only $40.00 each, including the sales tax and a tip. During the course of this scenario, learners are invited to complete the action-oriented tasks: find three restaurants, compare alternatives and food choices in each of them, learn about the restaurant culture, and, finally, have dinner. At the end, the waiter brings a "Comment Card", where customers are asked to describe their experiences, which is an example of an artefact students create.

Descriptors from the CEFRCV and their adaptations provide the backbone for designing scenarios at different levels of language proficiency and with different competence foci. On top of descriptors for different language activities and competences, descriptors for plurilingual and pluricultural competence (PPC) and for mediation provide visibility to the dynamic process that learners/social agents are engaged in, as well as specifically to the need for the different forms of mediation and the resources they can draw upon.

About the LINCDIRE Project

In 2015, a collaborative international project,[8] the **LIN**guistic and **C**ultural **DI**versity **RE**invented (LINCDIRE), was shaped with a focus on linguistic and cultural awareness. Approaching the partnership from four interrelated areas of expertise (i.e., plurilingualism, language innovation, technology-enhanced language teaching, and Indigenous ways of knowing (and sharing knowledge of official, minority, and Indigenous languages in elementary to post-secondary, formal and informal contexts)), project members expressed concern over the fate of non-dominant languages and cultures (Scholze et al., forthcoming*)*. This research activity led to the creation of an online platform based on a pedagogical model which 1) structures work around plurilingual, action-oriented scenarios; 2) positions language learners as social agents whose entire linguistic repertoire is potentially functional to task achievement; 3) encourages holistic development of the learner; 4) encourages students to interact with the

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[8] https://www.lincdireproject.org/

linguistic and cultural trajectories of others; and 5) promotes post-task reflection rooted in Indigenous worldviews (Scholze et al., forthcoming*).*

A way to take into consideration all this complexity and use it to leverage further agency from the learners is to reason through real-life scenarios, based on student needs or interests and with a plurilingual and pluricultural component. Scenarios stretch over a series of steps (tasks) targeted at accompanying the learner/social agent in their learning process, in which they are encouraged to use all their linguistic and cultural resources and through which they will eventually be able to accomplish real-life oriented culminating tasks. Hence, action-oriented scenarios and tasks in LINCDIRE emphasize the subjective and holistic nature of language(s) and language use and mobilize the plurilingual and pluricultural repertoires of language learners. "Translation between languages" and "making linguistic and cultural comparison" are just two examples of plurilingual and pluricultural components which are added to one or two steps toward the culminating task. The examples of scenarios (tasks) are available at https://lite.lincdireproject.org/all-scenarios-2/.[9]

Methodology

Context, participants, resources

The LINCDIRE project was carried out in a linguistically and culturally diverse North American context (Rumbaut & Massey, 2013), aiming to introduce effective pedagogical strategies which can harness the educational potential of cultural diversity and societal multilingualism (Li, 2014).

Participants (N=140) were 25 teachers and 115 students from 16 language learning classes representing nine languages: English, French, German, Spanish, Anishinaabemowin, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Arabic, and Italian. These languages were taught from pre-A1/A1 (beginner) to B2/C1 (advanced) levels for elementary, high-school children, and adults. German, French, Spanish, and Anishinaabemowin languages were taught in elementary and high schools in Canada and the US. There were Arabic and Italian Heritage Language Program classes for adult learners, Bulgarian and Ukrainian classes for high-school students, and German classes in an elementary private school. Learners in these classes presented a heterogenous group of speakers of English, and a range of minority and immigrant languages.

Resources were developed for teachers to access through the online platform, Language Integration Through E-portfolio (LITE), and included scenarios and action-oriented tasks

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[9] An example of a scenario which is called "Let's go for dinner" can be found here: https://lite.lincdireproject.org/course/lets-go-for-dinner/

alongside an e-portfolio specifically focusing on the individual's plurilingual repertoire. Each scenario was action-oriented, integrating plurilingual and pluricultural components, and culminating in an action-oriented task.

Data collection

Prior to the start of the project, researchers sought consent from participating teachers, corresponding institutions, students, and parents. We provided the list of scenarios for teachers to select from or modify. Teachers planned scenarios and timelines for their implementation, researchers visited classes to provide details of the project. We collected data through student surveys before and after working on scenarios, classroom observations and online teacher discussion questions during the implementation, student focus groups, and teacher interviews at the end of the scenario work. First, students completed an online survey about their attitudes to plurilingual and pluricultural approaches in teaching. Then, researchers did one- to two-hour classroom observations, and teachers provided feedback during scenario implementation guided by the online discussion questions. One third of each class participated in student focus groups and all students completed the online survey again after finishing work on the scenario. Finally, teacher interviews were conducted. All data was then transcribed and coded using NVivo 12 software.

Data analysis

In this article, we examine data collected from teacher interviews and student focus groups. We analysed the teacher and student files separately, using NVivo Matrix Coding queries. Data analysis of the teacher file involved crosstabulation of the main nodes (Tasks-Scenarios, Plurilingualism, Pluriculturalism, LITE, Advice and Suggestions) and their subnodes (Successes and Challenges) with case classification attributes (Country, Student Age, Student Level, Target Language, Task, Type of Education). The analysis resulted in numerical data representing a number of references, which we grouped into tables and analyzed further. The qualitative analysis involved interpretation of data, supporting the findings with quotes, and identifying dominant themes. Data analysis of the student file was done similarly and interpreted using a framework analysis (Parkinson et al., 2016) and content analysis (Cohen et al., 2017). The teacher file analysis served as a framework for the analysis of the student file. Themes that emerged from teacher interviews informed the analysis of data from student focus groups. Finally, researchers compared the teacher and student file analyses to highlight successes and challenges for both groups of participants.

Findings

Innovative features and successes of the plurilingual approach

This section focuses on innovative features[10] of the plurilingual approach adopted in the LINCDIRE project through the lens of mediation as a conceptual framework. Data analysis particularly focuses on the successful aspects[11] of the project, based on reports from teacher and student participants. One of the pillars of LINCDIRE was to develop and introduce innovation in language teaching methodology, which involved the selection and combination of the following innovative features: (a) scenarios and action-oriented tasks, (b) interconnected plurilingual and pluricultural components, and (c) integrated online and in-class learning through LITE. In this paper, we look at these innovative features through the conceptual framework of mediation, as it provides theoretical and practical foundation for the integral parts of the project.

Action-oriented Approach: Agency and mediation

The action-oriented approach (AoA) was theorised and envisaged as a new development in language teaching methodology, in a pedagogical representation of the CEFR teaching philosophy (Piccardo & North, 2019). Data analysis showed that the task/scenario concept was the most successful element of the project for teachers and students. Teachers reported on the successful use of resources and ways tasks have been implemented, including the opportunity to creatively modify tasks according to learners' needs:

> It was perfect for this time of the year. I went through it and I decided right at the first meeting, when we sat down and I looked at the scenarios ... I decided that this was going to be something that…I can adopt, ... I can integrate. (Oksana-A, Teacher[12])

Students often talked about their interest and motivation in relation to scenario implementation:

> I think she used a really good tactic; she would explain one part and show it to us. And then once ...most of us have finished that, she would explain the next part. And then we

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[10] This data analysis builds on the previous analysis of teacher and student participants' responses to the plurilingual action-oriented methodological approach adopted in the project. The previous analysis involved several steps: 1) based on participants' responses, we identified the successful and challenging aspects of the project for the whole set of data; 2) as a result of multilevel coding, we distinguished the innovative features of the plurilingual approach; 3) we described the reasons for successes and challenges for each; 4) finally, we analysed the potential of the innovative features for research on pedagogical innovation.

[11] In this article, we analyse the successful aspects of the innovative features to identify the role that mediation played for its effective implementation. The challenging aspects of the project and the approach adopted were not associated with the mediational characteristics of its features.

[12] "The Time Machine" https://lite.lincdireproject.org/course/the-time-machine/

first to finish that and the next part, so... she didn't give us too much information at once. It was kind of balanced. (Ros1B, Student[13])

Both teachers and students, represented respectively in the quotes below, believed authenticity and authentic resources were another successful aspect of the project:

I love it. I see a lot of potential. I'd like to include more of this kind of scenario where we get to that authentic task through these meaningful scaffolded activities. (Jane-A, Teacher[14])

I think it was kind of cool … it's sort of fun to not just do textbook stuff, like stuff that's more real world. ... I think being able to actually talk about watching a movie, maybe not in the formal setting that we did it in, but it's something that you might do with your friends... I think that was pretty cool that we were able to do that as an assessment. (Jane2B, Student[15])

Another innovative feature of the AoA is mediation, as recently conceptualized in the CEFRCV. Data analysis focuses on such sets of descriptors as *Facilitating collaborative interaction with peers* and *Mediating a text* or *Cross-linguistic mediation* (CoE, 2020). In relation to that, data analysis showed that teachers and students respectively appreciated opportunities for collaboration:

Definitely it was the opportunity to speak to one another and engage in a communicative activity that didn't depend on me leading it. I gave them a chance to practice and they knew that that practice was leading towards a final scenario. And it was also based on something that they would do in real life. So, I think that was motivating to them. (Jane-B, Teacher[16])

I think it was nice…we were pretty much connecting the entire time, ... some of us don't connect with some people, and then we got to learn more about each other, so I thought that the project was quite fun. (Ros4B, Student[17])

Both groups of participants reported they gained knowledge about the AoA approach, because they accessed linguistic resources in various languages, allowing for cross-linguistic mediation to happen and resulting in improved language awareness:

I think what I enjoyed the most was when we watched all the videos. I was blown away to see the videos. I knew a little bit what they were doing, what they were talking about,

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[13] "Our Community Cookbook" https://lite.lincdireproject.org/course/our-community-cookbook/
[14] "Winter Olympics" https://lite.lincdireproject.org/course/winter-olympics/
[15] "Let's go to the movies" https://lite.lincdireproject.org/course/Let's-go-to-the-movies/
[16] "Let's go to the movies" https://lite.lincdireproject.org/course/Let's-go-to-the-movies/
[17] "Our Community Cookbook" https://lite.lincdireproject.org/course/our-community-cookbook/

what time they chose ... I knew a little bit about what they would do, right? But I hadn't seen yet the results. The day that I started watching all these videos ... I saw the creativity of the students. How they used the editing of the videos, the imagination of putting all this together ... it was mind-blowing. It was really amazing. (Jesus, Teacher[18])

Plurilingualism through pluriculturalism and back: Mediation between language and culture

PPC has been at the core of plurilingualism as a theoretical framework since its development, assuming an interrelated nature of language and culture (Coste et al., 2009). A focus on mediation was a recent innovative feature included in the CEFRCV, and it involved new descriptors related to PPC. These included sets of descriptors for *Plurilingual comprehension*, *Building on plurilingual repertoire*, and sets of descriptors for different aspects of cross-linguistic mediation (mediating a text), which described the plurilingual component, and descriptors for *Building on pluricultural repertoire*, *Facilitating pluricultural space*, and sociolinguistic appropriateness describing the pluricultural component (CoE, 2020). LINCDIRE data analysis also demonstrated that learning about culture could facilitate language learning and vice versa, reflecting the mediation suggested by the descriptors. Both groups of participants reported greater awareness of cultural diversity and successes in the use of various linguistic resources. However, teachers' greater awareness of cultural diversity could be explained by the effective use of linguistic resources and pluricultural components of the tasks. For teachers, culture mediated their students' language learning:

> And then culturally speaking, of course, they are learning Italian, not only for the pleasure of learning a new language but also because they are interested in the culture that that language represents and unlocks. ...I think we should always try to incorporate culture in our language classes. And I think...it's impossible to separate the two things. (Sergio, Teacher[19])

At the same time, students' comments reflected the opposite: they appreciated the plurilingual component more, emphasized knowledge gained about plurilingualism, and learned about different cultures thanks to various linguistic resources they used. For students, on the contrary, it was language that mediated cultural learning:

> People seemed to be like, "woah this is a fun topic, this has something to do with the culture." And actually, it's probably an indication that it's very much attached to the culture because as soon as I looked at the lexicon, I was like, "Oh my god, almost every second, third, fourth or fifth word were, oh yeah this applies, this applies, this applies.

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[18] "The Time Machine" https://lite.lincdireproject.org/course/the-time-machine/
[19] "Our museum, Our Stories" https://lite.lincdireproject.org/course/our-museum-our-stories/

So that was a really clever way to build our vocabulary. Connected to this part of the culture. (Mir 2, Student[20])

Beyond the classroom: Integration of online and in-class learning via LITE

Another innovative feature of the LINCDIRE project is the integration of online and in-class learning through LITE as a digital platform. Integrated cultural and language learning can be effectively facilitated with the help of portfolios for language learning. Not only can portfolios function as mediational tools for language learning, but the use of technology in the form of an e-portfolio is another form of mediation, serving the ultimate purpose of language and cultural learning by fostering authentic social interaction. Furthermore, the CEFRCV (CoE, 2020) included online interaction as another type of activity, with new descriptors for *Online conversation & discussion* and *Goal-oriented online transactions & collaboration* highlighting the mediational character of online interaction. Although LITE was still in the process of development during data collection, teachers' and students' reports on its successful implementation showed its mediational characteristics reflected in the CEFR descriptors. Teachers commented on the successful use of LITE functionalities (My Plurilingual Journey[21], Task/Scenario Catalogue[22]) in terms of how they helped promote students' reflections:

> So, there are functionalities that look very interesting, like the reflections and also the posts, but I wouldn't want to over-emphasize that because ultimately I think that the oral exchange in the classroom is crucial. So, reflections can be a supplement or complement, and it is something that definitely would need training, because students are not used to that, but I think it could be beneficial. … I think it needs to be incorporated in course requirements to be done. (Allison, Teacher[23])

Teachers also appreciated LITE's social function feature[24] and the possibility of connecting classrooms and accessing the "broader audience":

> ... to me the broader audience is a very important component of LITE. … for me it's a very important aspect of it. It's not just an online place for students within the class to

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[20] "Pow Wow" https://lite.lincdireproject.org/course/pow-wow/

[21] My Plurilingual Journey is a functionality of a LITE online platform. The use of LITE involves creation of a linguistic profile, which means describing one's linguistic journey and language repertoire. This social networking functionality allows users to learn more about each other through reading My Plurilingual Journey section and follow other users.

[22] Task/Scenario Catalogue is a list of all available on the website scenarios with the developed tasks https://lite.lincdireproject.org/all-scenarios-2/

[23] "Lost in New Town" https://lite.lincdireproject.org/course/lost-in-a-new-town/

[24] The LITE online platform's social features are similar to those of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, which allow users to create a profile, post, follow, and connect with other people. Additionally, users can share their work, see their linguistic progress and connect to various language learning and teaching communities, because the main purpose of this online tool is to aid plurilingual learning and teaching.

> post their work … track their progress, and ... plan their trajectory in their learning. That is very important for me as well, ... the connection between classrooms, otherwise we feel so isolated as German teachers. (Natalie, Teacher[25])

Students also found LITE beneficial as a social networking tool enabling them to know more about their classmates. High-school students especially liked social media function of LITE:

> …one thing I did like about, I liked … how you could connect with people. Like using the accounts and how you could follow people as well. (Jan1A, Student[26])

> …but because of LITE, it was asking us our history and other languages we know, we actually got into conversation with people about their origins. (Mir1, Student[27])

Students also enjoyed the My Plurilingual Journey functionality of LITE, which opened up opportunities for online conversation:

> I liked it because it gives people an opportunity to know more about you, not just everything you see, but more of... your journey of how many languages you speak, more about your family. It's not something you can tell by looking at a person, by reading the profile, we know a lot about the person. (Ole5, Student[28])

LITE was introduced as a digital platform enabling multimodal activities: access to resources for teachers (e.g., a series of scenarios), level checks (CEFR language proficiency levels, e.g., A1, B2), written interactions for students (e.g., My Plurilingual Journey, Reflections), and social networking functions (posting, sharing, following) for students and teachers. The way LITE was utilized by the participants, even at the early stages of its development, showed that this digital platform performed its functions as a mediational tool, creating opportunities for online conversations and discussions as well as online collaboration.

To conclude, we found that innovative features of the LINCDIRE project have mediational characteristics, which we matched with the descriptors of mediation in the CEFR Companion Volume (CEFRCV) (Council of Europe, 2020). For scenarios and action-oriented tasks, mediation presented itself as collaboration (*facilitation of collaborative interaction[29]*) and use of linguistic resoures (*cross-linguistic mediation*). For plurilingual and pluricultural competence, mediation was evident through awareness of cultural diversity (*facilitation of pluricultural space*) and culture mediating language learning (*building on pluricultural*

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[25] "Traditional Storytelling for the 21st Century" https://lite.lincdireproject.org/course/title-traditional-storytelling-for-the-21st-century/

[26] "Winter Olympics" https://lite.lincdireproject.org/course/winter-olympics/

[27] "Pow Wow" https://lite.lincdireproject.org/course/pow-wow/

[28] "The Time Machine" https://lite.lincdireproject.org/course/the-time-machine/

[29] the mediational features in *italics* are the matching descriptors from the CEFRCV

repertoir) for teachers, while for students it was evident through effective use of linguistic resources leading to awareness of cultural diversity (*plurilingual comprehension*) and language mediating cultural learning (*building on plurilingual repertoire*). For blended learning via LITE, mediation was achieved through the use of LITE functionalities: My Plurilingual Journey, Task Catalogue, and social media functions (*goal-oriented online transactions & collaboration, online conversation & discussion*).

Discussion, Conclusion, and Next Steps

Data from the LINCDIRE project provided interesting insight into the issue of innovation in language education through the use of a plurilingual action-oriented approach, in which mediation plays a pivotal role. Based on the analysis presented here, we return to our two research questions:

RQ 1: How can innovative features of a plurilingual approach inform the teaching of modern languages in English-dominant classrooms, especially in the North American context?

One of the main characteristics of plurilingualism is the fact that various language resources can be used meaningfully in everyday life, that languages are complex endeavours in which there are events, historical developments, and cultural artifacts but also individuals, each with their own histories, identities, as well as their own emotions and feelings. Students participating in the study seemed to connect easily with this vision, venturing into new explorations of language and culture within the class and outside in their community/ies (see quote *Jane2B, Student*). Teachers were also very intrigued by this perspective (see quotes *Oksana-A, Teacher; Jane-A, Teacher*), even though they sometimes felt more hesitant in engaging with this path, as they were more used to being more fully in control of the development of classroom activities when following a structured curriculum.

The data suggest that by placing learners at the center of their learning processes, an action-oriented plurilingual approach helps to raise self-esteem among the growing immigrant population and minority language speakers in English dominant classrooms and accompanies them appropriately and humanly to succeed in their schooling itinerary alongside their peers (see teacher and student quotes in section 6.2. above). This finding is consistent with other classroom-based research literature in the field that plurilingual approaches are more effective than monolingual approaches as they can promote students' self-esteem or self-confidence, resulting in greater learner agency (e.g., Álvarez and Pérez-Cavana, 2015; Corcoll, 2013; Galante, et. al., 2020).

Plurilingualism goes hand in hand with pluriculturalism in a mutually nourishing loop: knowledge about culture embodies and fleshes out the language(s) and by doing that it educates language learners as well as fosters language awareness. In turn, knowledge of and about languages creates interest in respective cultures and integrates language and cultural learning, eventually enhancing learners' motivation (see student and teacher quotes in section 6.3. above). This effect appears clearly in the data and is well-aligned with a number of other research studies that suggest that plurilingual methodologies positively enhance students' language awareness (e.g., Álvarez & Pérez-Cavana, 2015; Corcoll, 2013; Faez et al., 2011a, 2011b; Galante, 2018; Oyama & Yamamoto, 2020; Prasad, 2014; Woll, 2018).

The integration of online and in-class learning via the digital platform LITE appears to help break down the classroom walls, broadening the learning space by connecting communities and reducing barriers between languages and cultures (see quote *Natalie, Teacher*). Teachers can connect with their counterparts in other contexts and students in the same classroom can connect with each other as well as with peers around the world, which may enhance intercultural communication (see teacher and student quotes in section 6.4. above). This is echoed by Sugranyes and Gonzales (2014) who purport that plurilingual approaches had a positive effect on students' overall language proficiency, along with an increase in motivation and some development of pupils' intercultural communicative competence.

RQ 2: What role does mediation play in language teaching within the plurilingual approach?

As we know innovating is not an easy endeavour, especially when it comes to language education (Arber, Weinmann, & Blackmore, 2020; Reinders, Coombe, Littlejohn & Tafazoli, 2019). Presenting teachers with new concepts such as plurilingualism can appear challenging. The notion that it is a good idea to use and build upon all linguistic resources in each of the individual's languages, to mix and mesh, to act creatively in the learning process, to venture into an unstructured path by exerting one's agency can be daunting. However, things change when teachers—and students—are helped to reason in terms of mediation, as mediation can be an "enabling factor" for the innovative pedagogy (Piccardo & North, 2019; Human-Vogel & Bouwer, 2005). As we saw, adopting a mediational perspective allows us to move beyond the noun form 'language' to the verb form 'languaging', which we defined as "the form of social agency able to negotiate between interactive and self-directed meta-regulation linguistic sense-making" (Cuffari et al., 2015, p. 1110). This perspective helps make sense of the situated and evolving nature of each language and of each form of languaging. Mediation inevitably involves the integration of language and culture (Galante, 2020): language and culture are interrelated because language learning mediates cultural knowledge (culture can be learned through language) and knowledge about culture mediates language learning (language can be learned through culture) (see quote *Sergio, Teacher*). Data from participating students clearly showed

that they became more aware of this. Some 'aha' moments reported were in this sense revealing (see quote *Mir 2, Student)*.

Mediated learning also affects the overall learning environment. In the context of English-dominance, mediated learning is a key factor in fostering a non-hierarchical linguistic learning context. The data from heritage language classes showed a motivation and engagement resulting from a newly awakened interest in the language learnt in a more realistic and collaborative way (see quotes *Mir1, Student; Mir 2, Student)*. Mediation as a salient feature of plurilingual approaches is also crucial for language revitalization (Elliott, in press).

However, understandably, space needs to be made for mediation to flourish: mediational features of LITE, the e-portfolio for language learning—such as access to various linguistic and cultural resources, the opportunity to check levels in various languages and share linguistic and cultural biographies—have shown promising potential for enhancing learners' plurilingual repertoires (see quotes *Allison, Teacher; Jan1A, Student; Mir1, Student; Ole5, Student)*, especially by enhancing "cohesion between community, emotion, action and reflection in language learning in a condensed vision of complexity, in order to meet the needs of today's global society" (Germain-Rutherford & Karamifar, forthcoming). Certainly, such resources have sparked a process that will hopefully continue developing.

On the teachers' side, knowledge about the role of mediation came as a new discovery to many. Even though instinctively some teachers had already been operationalizing aspects of mediation without being aware of it, being offered access to targeted descriptors of mediation alongside resources and a learning environment built around mediation opened a new perspective. The result was to greatly enhance their motivation to venture along that path, even though this involved longer-term planning.

Benefits and implications from the LINCDIRE project

The LINCDIRE project started some years ago, with data being collected from different languages and in different contexts and levels. Interest in the project is growing with new teachers showing interest and being involved by using the resources and becoming themselves creators of resources, in a positive loop of research-practice-research. At this point, we can identify a series of potential benefits of the projects for teachers, and administrators:

Teachers will benefit from: 1) learning about the AoA as an innovative pedagogical approach; 2) using scenarios and tasks to ensure authentic and real-life use of language and cultural resources and to enhance collaborative work in the classroom; 3) using relevant, contextually appropriate authentic resources to increase student motivation; 4) viewing their roles as that of

facilitators rather than instructors in the classroom, which allows for increasing learners' agency; 5) seeing the pluricultural component as an integral part of plurilingual tasks, which, in turn, can enhance language awareness and socio-linguistic and pragmatic competence; 6) becoming knowledgeable about digital learning tools and utilizing them in the classroom as effective instruments for enhancing learners' motivation, access to information, and assessment tools.

Administrators will benefit from learning about plurilingual pedagogies and from arranging professional development for language teachers focusing on pedagogical innovation. In this way they can potentially focus on *agency*—both by students and teachers—as the organizing principle of the curriculum, rather than a rigid and pre-set grammatical progression, occasionally accompanied by a simulacre of communication. Finally, the LINCDIRE project spanned different geographical contexts, and to do this relied heavily on remote communication and online learning. Though initially, for work to be conducted in the classroom, different circumstances and constraints contributed to shifting the work online. This was challenging but proved that it is possible to work collaboratively and creatively, in a plurilingual action-oriented perspective, also remotely, something that became particularly important during the COVID-19 epidemic. A large school board in Ontario approached the LINCDIRE team because they precisely intended to use LITE and the approach in their heritage language classes. The results have been so encouraging so far that the Board decided to continue and extend the use of the resources and the environment in the coming Fall semester.

Finally, research in the field will benefit from more focus on: 1) the design and implementation of action-oriented tasks and scenarios to investigate how mediational plurilingual activities can increase student motivation and language awareness; 2) the construct of the plurilingual and pluricultural competence and its relation to mediation; 3) the way digital learning tools and e-portfolios open up opportunities for student autonomy, plurilingual/pluricultural awareness, and student self-assessment as well as additional assessment tools for teachers.

Acknowledgements

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