Iulian Boldea, Cornel Sigmirean (Editors)
*MULTICULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS. Literature and Discourse as Forms of Dialogue*
Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, 2016
ISBN: 978-606-8624-16-7
***Section: Language and Discourse***


# PLURILINGUISTIC DIDACTIC APPROACHES TO TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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*Abstract: In the nowadays political, economical and cultural background, bilingualism and multilingualism have acquired new meanings. We should speak about plurilingualism, and consequently, about plurilingual approaches to languages and cultures all over the world, an issue occurred due to contemporary factors, such as globalization, migration, change of demography, multiculturalism or the ascent of languages that have not been considered "important" so far. Thus, a plurilingual didactic approach, as well as a good management of learning languages, should be also applied to teaching languages in schools. Plurilingual education aims at developing plurilingualism as a competence, being achieved through activities that raise awareness of the contemporary linguistic, religious, economical, cultural and relational diversity. A group of university and high school teachers and trainers from different parts of the world pioneered a theory called FREPA, or "A framework of References for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures" (2011), which deals with the study and teaching of more simultaneous foreign languages in an intercultural context, emphasizing necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes. They have identified the need of a special syllabus to complete the National Core Curricula of different countries and the Common European Reference Framework for Languages. While being a foreign languages school inspector and an English teacher in high school, I have paid particular attention to comparing the traditional English Curriculum issued by the Romanian Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research to the new one proposed by FREPA, issue which I am going to discuss briefly in the present paper.*

*Keywords: plurilingualism,, multilingualism, curriculum,, competence, didactic approach.*

The issue of language diversity is a complex one. In spite of the fact that communication, could be less difficult with fewer languages, however, people prefer to speak more languages, in order to take some advantages over particular situations. Bilingualism and multilingualism are two terms which designate the knowledge and the use/speaking of more than one language by individuals or communities, with different levels of proficiency. A bilingual's native language may affect his or her functioning in the foreign language(s), as Eleine Chaika considers that bilingualism is both individual and societal. (Chaika 1994:34-37). Individuals may have varying fluencies in their languages and they may use different languages in different domains of their lives. There are more types of societal multilingualism and the most well-known one refers to a country where there are more language groups, usually due to different cultural contacts, migration or annexation in case of colonial islands.

Consequently, the study of bilingualism and multilingualism is not only related to the study of language, but it is also related to the study of the societal characteristics. Ralph Fasold gives the example of the African and Asian states which have hundreds of languages and it is not uncommon for the people living there to be bilingual or multilingual. Multilinguals have clear advantages over the monolinguals, since the linguistic knowledge

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extends outside the area of language, as Kamal states in the *Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching.* (1996:47). Multilingual have proved to demonstrate greater metalinguistic awareness, that is to say, knowledge about the language, flexibility of the mind and competence to think abstractly.

One step forward was Hymes' theory of connecting multilingualism and the ethnography of communication. Hymes proposed the term "ethnography of speaking", later amended to "ethnography of communication", to describe a new approach to understanding language in use (Hymes, 1964, 1974). Hymes ceased to consider language speech as an abstract model and, instead, he moved toward investigating language as it is encountered in ethnographic fieldwork. Hymes argues that "the study of language must concern itself with describing and analyzing the ability of the native speakers to use language for communication in real situations (communicative competence) rather than limiting itself to describing the potential ability of the ideal speaker/listener to produce grammatically correct sentences (linguistic competence)." Essentially, the ethnography of communication deals with what a person knows about appropriate patterns of language use in his or her community and how he or she learns about it, or "the way of speaking."

New other theories about the learning and teaching of a language have been formulated afterwards, coming to Hornberger, Paradowski and other contemporary linguists. Language appears as "an intimate part of social identity" in Hornberger view, thus teachers need to know how to respect all language and culture characteristic and still enable students to achieve the linguistic mastery of a foreign language.

The *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe* was devised during meetings of a Scientific Committee composed in preparation for the conference entitled "Linguistic Diversity for Democratic Citizenship in Europe" (Innsbruck, May 1999) and it was released in 2001, revised in 2003 and 2007 at the Council of Europe, at Strasbourg. It is an analytical tool of renewing language teaching from a linguistic point of view. They consider bilingualism and multilingualism as the presence of more languages in a territory, not meaning necessarily that people know how to speak more languages. Plurilingualism is referred to as being the term related to linguistic ideologies and languages policies which enable the study of more languages.

*Plurilingual education* is defined as a frame of curricular or extra-curricular activities, which seek to enhance and develop language competence and speakers' individual linguistic repertoires, from the first schooldays and during the entire life. Plurilingual education (for example, teaching national, foreign, regional languages) aims at developing plurilingualism as a competence. It should be noted that plurilingual education may also be achieved through activities designed principally to raise awareness of linguistic diversity, tolerance and democratic citizenship, thus "the aim of plurilingualism and plurilingual education is […] to develop plurilingual competence and intercultural education, as a way of living together." (Beacco, 2007: 36).

The general trend in the foreign languages teaching all over the world is to pay particular attention to as many languages as possible, to give more classes to languages and that regional or immigrants' languages to be also taught. Yet, the study of languages has not been mainly changed and teachers and students teach and learn using the same curriculum they used many years ago. In fact, implementing plurilingualism involves awareness of democratic and pluricultural society and citizenship, specific methods and syllabus and specially prepared teachers, familiar with social representations of languages as well as linguistic characteristics.

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A group of university and high school teachers and trainers from different parts of the world, pioneered a theory called FREPA, or "A framework of References for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures" (2011), which deals with the study and teaching of foreign languages in an *intercultural context*. Families speak more languages at home due to different background factors and teachers are also sometimes forced to teach languages using other foreign languages. The pluralistic approaches are contrasted with the so called singular approaches, which deals with the study of a language and culture in isolation. It goes without saying that English is the main language of communication in the world, a tool which offers access to modernity. However, English should be taught as to stimulate speakers' plurilingualism. In the same way, other languages such as Chinese have started to play an important role in the reality of the contemporary world.

The pluralistic approach to languages and cultures refers to "the didactic approaches which involve the use of several […] variety of languages or cultures simultaneously during the teaching process, abandoning the "compartmentalized" view of an individual's linguistic and cultural competence(s)." (FREPA, 2011). The FREPA linguists even thought of a global competences Framework of Reference to complete the existing Common European Reference Framework for Languages as well as the National Core Curricula from different countries, the newly devised one being closely linked to social relevance and two types of "resources": internal (knowledge, attitudes, skills) and external (dictionaries, mediators, economical factors, etc). They consider that, in order to help learners deepen their plurilingual competences, educators should help them acquire a set of items of knowledge (*savoirs*), attitudes (*savoir-etre*) and skills (*savoir-faire*) about linguistic and cultural facts in general, as well as to give them access to a specific language or culture, by using aptitudes obtained in connection with another language or culture.

While being a foreign languages school inspector and an English teacher in high school, I have paid particular attention to comparing the traditional English Curriculum issued by the Romanian Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research to the new one proposed by FREPA, issue which I am going to discuss briefly in the following lines.

The National Romanian Core Curriculum for the English class, the 10$^{th}$ grade, theoretical profile, was emitted through the Minister's Order No. 4598 / 31.08.2004. It has the following structure: General Competences (4), Attitudes and Values (4), Specific Competences, Related Contents and Methodological Suggestions. Using Tropes Software we can use numerous Semantic Analysis tools designed for Qualitative Analysis and Linguistic Analysis. Applying TROPES to the present document, the general information about the present curriculum is that it has a descriptive style and it is active and dynamic due to various active verbs and phrases. There is a clear correspondence between the form and the presentation, however, the semantic analysis proves that there is no reference to bilingualism, multilingualism or plurilingualism throughout the whole document. The four values and attitudes refer to very general fields, and although words like tolerance and international market are present there are no clear bonds between these terms and the content of the curriculum. The proposed contents are related to singular specific competences (Romanian-English), thus a person who speaks German, or any other language, as mother tongue will find it difficult to understand the explanations.

Our schools have more and more students coming from abroad as a result of migration or re-migration. Migration of students in our schools is a cause of their parents' coming to work in Romania from Africa, China, etc., while re-migration means the situation in which Romanian families relocate from countries where they used to work for years. These students

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find it difficult to understand explanations in Romanian or English sometimes, hence, a pluralistic didactic approach would be of much help. Analyzing the FREPA Curriculum with the same TROPES Software, the style of the documents is still descriptive but the setting is: involving the reader/narrator. There is a wide range of correspondences among terms such as education, family, countries, cultures, relations, languages, sameness, that is to say characteristics of a contemporary society.

*Fig. 1. TROPES Analysis*

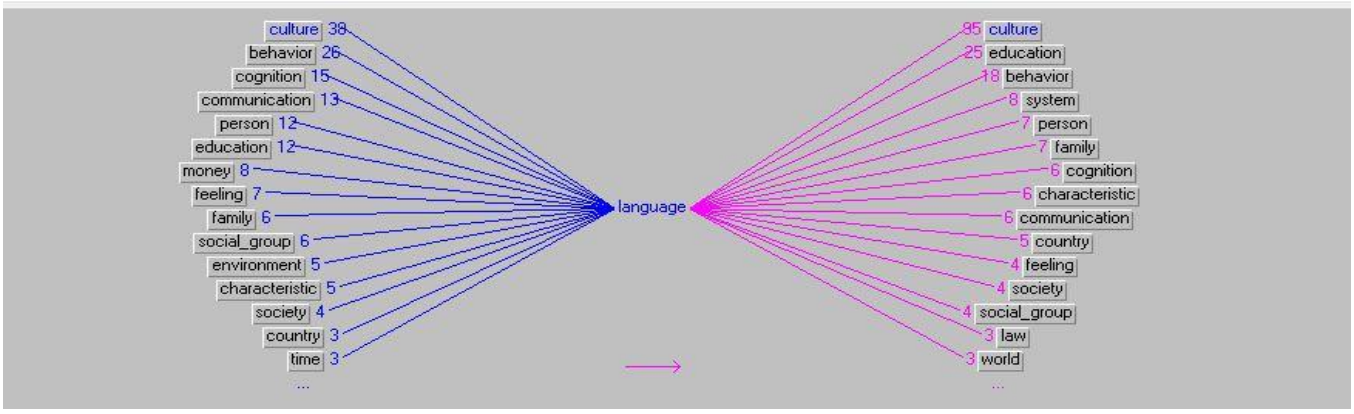
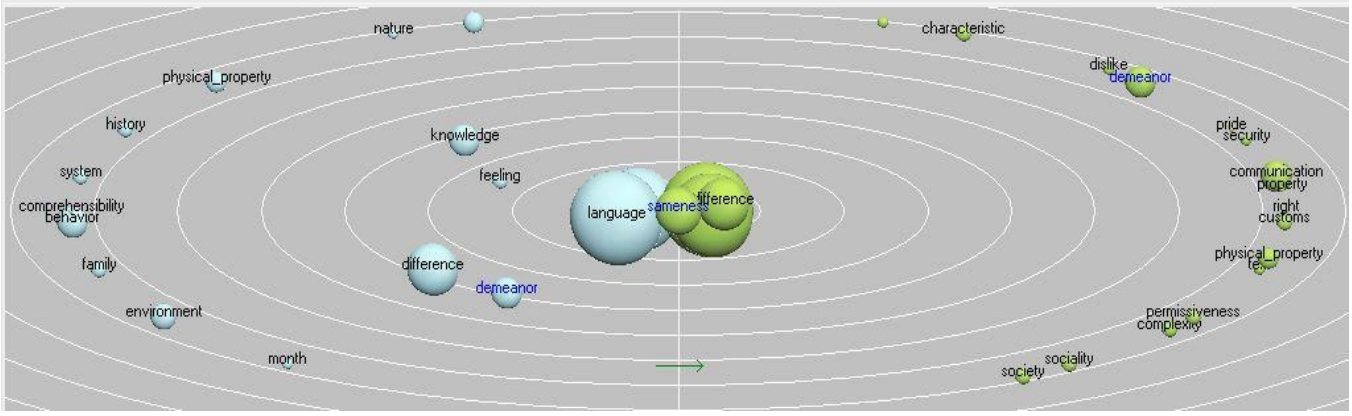



*Fig. 1. TROPES Analysis* *and*




The FREPA Curriculum has a general description and a table of seven global competences which are valid for every language and culture and concern the relationships between languages. In addition to these, there are tables of knowledge, attitudes and skills. Knowledge items comprise resources about language as a semiological system, the relation between language and society, verbal vs. non-verbal communication, diversity, multilingualism and plurilingualism, similarities and differences between languages, acquisition and learning of a language, cultures and resources to acquire information about cultures and a comparison of them. A list of complete resources of the FREPA model can be found on http://www.ecml.at/. Instances of such elements are the following, whereas the keys show the degree of importance of a particular descriptor:

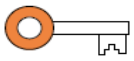
**Knowledge:**

| | |
|---|---|
| K 10.5 | Knows that the interpretation that others give to one's behaviours may be different from that which that same person himself / herself gives to that same behaviours |

**Attitudes:**

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| | |
|---|---|
| **A 6.1** | **Respect for differences and diversity (in a plurilingual and pluricultural environment)** |



**Skills:**

| | |
|---|---|
| **S 2.8** | **Can °identify [recognise]° cultural °specificities / references / affiliations** |



Necessary attitudes to develop the pluralistic approaches are curiosity, respect, attention, openness, acceptance, motivation, self-confidence and adaptation. Students also needs skills such as: to observe, to analyze, to recognize, to identify, to compare, etc. The descriptors are usually composed of an epistemological predicate nominal or verbal (knows, being aware of, can identify, readiness to, etc. ) and an object (cultures, languages, diversity, etc.). This range offers a logical semantic to descriptors and helps educators to clearly understand and apply the tasks and activities.

Eg. A 17.4. Having confidence in one's own abilities

Predicate Object

We can exemplify by taking into consideration a class activity devised on FREPA principles. Teaching students a classic simple lesson about Christmas, we can make use of various attractive didactic materials in different languages and the descriptors proposed by the FREPA theory. They can fill in the following grid:

| | Romanian | English | Spanish | French | Portuguese | Italian |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Food for Christmas | sarmale | turkey | paella | Boudin blanc | Bolo rei | Panettone |
| Parties | petrecere | pary | fiesta | partie | partido | partito |

Talking about the Christmas traditions, the following descriptors should be used: Knowledge:

K 3- *Knows some principles of how communication functions*, K 3.3. *Knows that one must adapt one's own communicative repertoire to the social and cultural context within which communication is taking place*, K 3.4.1. *Knows that one can try to resort to linguistic similarities {genealogical links, loans, universals} to facilitate communication*, K 6. *Knows that there are similarities and differences between languages*, K 9. *Knows some characteristics of the cultural environments. Attitudes: A 7. Disposition/ motivation towards linguistic/cultural diversity/plurality*, A 8.1. *Determination to take up the challenge of linguistic/cultural diversity*. Skills: S 2. *Can identify linguistic elements/cultural phenomena in languages/cultures which are more or less familiar*, etc.

On the other hand, the FREPA model misses some elements. If some levels of the language can be learned using these descriptors, it is hard, however, to teach grammar simultaneously in more languages, since all languages have different characteristics.

Overall, a comparison of the English Curriculum issued by the Romanian Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research and the FREPA curriculum proves that both of them have limittaions, strengths and weaknesses and that there is a clear opportunity of combining the two of them to achieve a new model of curriculum to be appropriate to the world we live in, under circumstances of "language awakening." (Candelier, 2007: 219).

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Carol Myers-Scott speaks about the so-called "linguistic wizards", namely students/learners that can move from one language to another, so these are the students we should teach. (Myers-Scott, 2006: 325). The activities that are based on the descriptors presented by FREPA will definitely develop the plurilinguistic and intercultural competences and help the "linguistic wizards" to evolve to a higher level.

Final conclusions about plurilingualism can be summarized as follows:

- Plurilingualism is a competence which can be acquired through various activities. More and more people today speak more languages as an option or a necessity.
- Plurilingual education does not aim to teach students more languages at very high levels of proficiency, but at the level of comprehension and communication.
- The importance of communicative resources is clearly emphasized.
- Plurilinguistic competence is considered to be a transversal one which extend to all languages.

Plurilingualism is a shared goal of the language education policies in Europe. Plurilingual education, as well as The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001), aim at making language teaching "transparent and coherent." (Beacco and Byram, 2003: 32).

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