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Multilingualism and Awareness of Cultural Differences in Communication

Irina-Ana Drobot

Abstract

The purpose of this chapter is to look at ways in which teaching and learning a foreign language can benefit from previous knowledge of other languages, when it comes to the awareness of linguistics, pragmatics, as well as of cultural differences. The assumption is that having knowledge of other languages and, implicitly, of cultures, can help increase awareness and empathy with other cultural values and mindsets. As a result, adaptation to the ways and values of other cultures can be easier and faster for multilinguals. Studying a foreign language should always be strongly connected to studying the respective culture, since it can increase awareness of the context of communication and help in the study of pragmatics. The chapter will analyze examples of multilinguals with these abilities and awareness and draw conclusions.

Keywords: pragmatics, linguistics, foreign language teaching, culture, civilization

1. Introduction

In today's world, contacts with different cultures are very frequent, as a consequence of globalization. As a result, we need cultural awareness and cultural competence in order to relate with empathy to different cultures, with different values and mindsets, rituals and traditions, as well as with different ways of communication. Topics of interest in the foreign language classroom include, aside from linguistics and conversational aspects, aspects related to contemporary culture and civilization, not just culture and civilization from some time ago in history. All traditions and events from history should be presented in relation to what is still relevant at present time. Students may find that old textbooks about the cultures related to the languages they are studying present a world they will no longer find in reality, during a trip. This is because we now live in a multicultural world. Different cultures can be found in the same country. We can come into contact with other cultures at various times in our lives, such as in the classroom, as both teachers and students, as well as at work, during international collaborations, and as tourists. Situations where we need to take care in order to minimize or even avoid culture shock are represented by moving to live in a different culture, going for work, or as students. Having accurate information about the different culture, as well as understanding the differences can help with adaptation, either on long or short term, depending on our stay. Language is an important part of any culture, and, what is more, it "does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited

assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives" [1]. The relationship between language and culture also consists of the fact that language is "a key to the cultural past of a society" [2], as well as a key to understanding "social reality" [3]. Thus, language is a means of reflecting a culture and its mindset, but also of influencing it and creating it: "The structure of a language determines the way in which speakers of that language view the world or, as a weaker view, the structure does not determine the world-view but is still extremely influential in predisposing speakers of a language toward adopting their world-view" [4].

In time, cultures change, since "they are dynamic, they interact and compete with one another" [5]. Culture is always changing with respect to its traditions, values and mindsets in order to answer to the needs of its members. One change when it comes to cultures can be visible in the phenomenon of multiculturalism, which is currently valued at the time. It refers to "a system of beliefs and behaviours that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society" [6]. Multilingualism can be regarded as a part of multiculturalism, just as language is part of any culture. According to Cutler [7], multiculturalism means ways of behaving and thinking, as well as learning styles, but also communication styles. Multilingualism can be understood as a communication style, but also as an influence on mindsets and values.

Through multilingualism, we can increase the awareness of cultural differences and feel empathy for these differences at the level of linguistics (especially pragmatics) as well as at the level of values and mindsets. Anyone that is multilingual is aware of different ways of communication and of relying on context of various cultures, not just his/her own. The ability of cultural awareness could be increased through multilingualism, which may, in its turn, help students learn easier another foreign language, since they already have knowledge of possible differences. In the foreign language classroom, the teacher could also make reference to other commonly known language(s) to help the students make connections and learn faster.

The main question this chapter deals with is whether multilingualism helps gain an increased awareness of the cultural differences in communication.

2. Impact of multilingualism on foreign language learning

By looking at various definitions of multilingualism, the aspect of being able to use certain languages for communication and to understand what is communicated in these languages stands out. We also notice that multilingualism can be regarded like a trend that is set at a political level, by the Council of Europe, by placing emphasis on diversity and understanding across languages and cultures, but also like a result of the situation in certain countries, where there are several official languages, not just one.

Multilingualism could be defined as "any degree of linguistic ability from an equally good command of two or more languages [...] to lesser abilities, active or passive, in one of the languages" [8]. It is believed that a multilingual person is "anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading)" [9]. The European Commission [10] defines multilingualism as "the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than on language in their day-to-day lives". Attention has been drawn to the individual multilingualism and the societal multilingualism distinction [11]. Plurilingualism, according to the Council of Europe, is the "repertoire of varieties of language which

many individuals use", while multilingualism is "the presence in a geographical area, large or small, of more than one 'variety of language'". In the foreign languages classroom, some students may be multilingual due to their individual preferences or contacts with other cultures, while some others can be multilingual due to the area where they live, if more languages are spoken. For instance, in Russia, twenty-four official languages are spoken, in India twenty-three, while in Switzerland there are four national languages.

Multilingualism can influence the way foreign language learning is going on in several aspects. First of all, if communicative language learning is practiced, the focus will be on the way conversations are understood, and notions of pragmatics will be given, sometimes theoretically, sometimes practically, sometimes by including both. Second, multilingualism is regarded as a means of helping students to adapt to the realities of the everyday world, a world which encourages both multiculturalism and multilingualism. What is more, learning a foreign language is always connected to beginning to understand the respective cultures, with its mindsets, values, as well as rituals and traditions. In this way, by knowing several languages, students can gain insight in the cultural differences and they can sympathize with other cultures. Third, if the class is made up of students belonging to other cultures and thus, having other native languages, or knowing other languages, then the teacher should take these students' background into account when planning the lessons and devising the activities. Fourth, if students and teachers know several languages, then they can use this background knowledge in order to make teaching and learning easier, and help students draw comparisons among the already known languages and the foreign language they are currently studying. Fifth, there could also be drawbacks in learning several languages, as previous knowledge could at times interfere with the currently studies language, which could lead to students producing incorrect answers.

2.1 Communicative approaches to foreign language learning and pragmatics

2.1.1 How being a multilingual speaker affects foreign language teaching

Foreign language teaching can take into consideration areas such as everyday life culture and dialogs, as well as grammar and vocabulary. A communicative approach is mostly preferred in foreign language teaching nowadays, especially since teaching is supposed to be student-centered, and students should participate actively in class. The communicative competence in foreign language teaching has been around since the 1970s, when the audio-lingual method was believed to help learners [12]. Active participation in class can be guided towards eagerness of students to participate in dialogs with their classmates. In this way, they can be made aware in their building of dialogs of frequently used phrases to address someone or to make polite requests, as well as of using specific formulas in specific contexts. Context awareness in communication is one of the teachings of pragmatics, together with the intended meaning suggested by the speaker. The following definitions could be applied to pragmatics: "Pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning", "Pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning", and "Pragmatics is the study of how more gets communicated than is said" [13].

One example regarding the domain of pragmatics could be given to native Romanian students that can compare direct and indirect politeness. While in English and French polite requests are formulated in an indirect way, the Romanian language uses a more direct formulation. For instance, while in English the polite request is formulated as: "Can I have your Syntax lecture notes please?", the Romanian equivalent is: "Dă-mi şi mie cursul de Sintaxă. *(Give me the Syntax lecture notes.)*" [14].

Polite requests differ in directeness and indirectness function of culture. As a result, indirect polite requests are also found in Hebrew and Spanish [15]. Those belonging to Uruguay culture prefer directness in polite requests [16]. Greeks prefer to offer reasons for the polite requests [17]. Some languages use more hints in requests, such as Japanese and English, which use them in a 40% proportion [18]. The hints in the Japanese language are, however, more opaque. According to research, there were less than 10% hints in the requests in English, French and Hebrew [19]. According to research [20–22], the Chinese polite requests can be more direct when social distance is small. These are all examples that can raise awareness of the cultural differences reflected in language as far as polite requests are concerned.

Increased pragmatic skills can be noticed in multilinguals. We can take the example of Grice's conversational implicatures, which are a type of inferences about the speaker's intended meaning [23]. For instance, in the dialog "John: Did all of the students pass the exam? Mary: Some of the students passed the exam." the following inferences can be drawn: "Some and possibly all of the students passed the exams" and "Not all of the students passed the exams.", the latter being a scalar implicature. Research results [24] "showed that bilingual children were more advanced than their monolingual peers in computing scalar implicatures." Studies [24] have been using conversational violations tests, according to which "bilingual children performed significantly better than their monolingual counterparts". Knowing two languages offers the possibility of gaining more background knowledge regarding conversations. Other researches mentioned in [23] include those listed under [25, 26], which conclude that "bilingualism boosts children's Theory of Mind-the ability to understand other people's mental states and intentions." Researchers [23] have started from this evidence supporting advantages in pragmatic abilities of children in order to extend their findings to multilinguals. However, their experiment's results [23] "provide only limited support for the position that multilingualism fosters children's pragmatic abilities. Overall, multilingual children were numerically better than bilectals in most implicature sub-tests including metaphor, irony, scalars 1 and scalars 2." What is more, they mention the following: [...] While the overall pattern of our results points towards a multilingual advantage, especially for the more demanding types of implicatures (i.e. irony), it does not provide robust evidence in favor of the hypothesis that exposure to more than one languages confers an advantage in children's conversational understanding." At the same time, their results show that multilinguals seem to benefit more from having wider background knowledge regarding conversation interpretation, as in the example of understanding irony. These findings could be used for practical aspects in foreign language teaching: the students could be given examples from several languages they know regarding conversational skills, so that they can draw their own comparisons and conclusions with respect to differences and similarities among languages. These comparisons could help them become aware of various ways in which communication works, through direct expression or through suggestions, implications and allusions. The favorable results from the experiments mentions with bilinguals, as well as multilinguals, may have to do with the fact that learning a foreign language "enhances children's understanding of how language itself works and their ability to manipulate language in the service of thinking and problem solving" [27]. By learning a foreign language, students have at times compared it with their own, and have gained insight into the way languages work regarding communication, as well as grammar and vocabulary. If students know Germanic and Romance languages, for example, they may draw further comparisons with new foreign languages they are attempting to learn. With their intuitive comparisons among languages, they can later have a basic background from where they can start their study of linguistics, of domains such as grammar and etymology.

The inclusion of exercises and notions based on pragmatics is necessary in the foreign language classroom, since studying grammar means only studying "how the formal knowledge of the language develops", while ignoring "the question of how the knowledge is transformed into actual usages, that is, into a productive use of language in its spoken and written forms, or, into socially and culturally appropriate usages" [28].

Besides skills in understanding conversations better, there is another skill that multilinguals can benefit from, namely "Multilinguals are more capable of separating meaning from form" [29]. Research has focused on the cognitive consequences of multilingualism: "multilinguals of different ages develop resources that allow them to perform better on some metalinguistic tasks and can even slow down some aspects of the cognitive decline associated with aging" [11]. These skills can make it easier for multilinguals to learn another foreign language, since it is suggested that they can become more sensitive intuitively to various aspects of the linguistic and communicational level.

There are studies which support the "relationship between multilingualism and conceptualization" [11]. Thus, "Some scholars consider that multilinguals and monolinguals have a conceptual base that is identical, while others think that the differences are not only quantitative but also qualitative." Other research mentioned is the "volume edited by Pavlenko (2011)", which "explores the way the acquisition of additional languages is related to conceptual development and restructuring and reports interesting findings on areas such as visual perception, inner speech, and gesturing" [11].

Foreign language teachers should take into consideration the above findings, and develop their activities in such a way as to take into account that students with a multilingual background can be more skillful in some areas of language learning, such as metalinguistic tasks, separation of meaning and form, a better conceptual base, and better conceptual development. At the same time, the foreign language teacher should also have in view to use the more perceptive skills the multilingual students have acquired in order to make differences between communication styles at the level of different cultures and languages more clear. For instance, the teacher could explain to these students, even if they feel them intuitively, the differences between direct and indirect communication cultures (or low context and high context communication cultures). Direct communication cultures focus on "getting or giving information" [30], and are, generally, Western cultures. Indirect communication cultures do not rely on saying the meaning directly, but instead on "pauses, silence, tone of voice" [31], and are, generally, Asian cultures. For indirect communication cultures, "The overriding goal of the communication exchange is maintaining harmony and saving face" [30]. Especially in indirect communication cultures, knowledge of pragmatics can be applied, since there are lots of instances when there are suggested meanings and allusions, both verbal, as well as non-verbal. For instance, in Japanese culture, hesitations and silence can show that someone does not agree with the interlocutor. While an interlocutor from the Western world would directly "yes" or "no", an interlocutor from the Asian cultures would even say "yes" when meaning "no" in order not to offend the interlocutor, but would provide instead hints and clues to what he/she means by silence, hesitation, and non-verbal communication.

2.1.2 How a speaker's native language and culture can impact the pragmatic language use in a foreign language

However, the native language and culture can influence the way that the speech acts are used in a foreign language. As an example, the researchers presented in [32] have done studies with respect to pragmatic skills in multilinguals and the way they

use the most frequently encountered speech acts of requests and refusals. For their study, they have been preoccupied by the degree of directness of requests and refusals that were formulated by "trilinguals for whom English is L2 (Hebrew speakers) and those for whom it is L3 (Arabic speakers), and the background variables that might explain this production". The Hebrew group of speakers showed a tendency for using direct requests, especially when using English at work. However, this tendency could be related to the way that requests are used directly when having informal relationships with work colleagues. The Arab group of speakers used less frequently direct requests when they were speaking with close persons, such as family. Arabic culture has the tendency to use direct requests with family [32]. The Arab group tended to use indirect refusals, "as the number of years of exposure to English increased" [32]. While Israeli Arabic is "more direct than English and even Hebrew (Katriel, 1986, 2004)", it was noticed that "increasing exposure to English may increase the level of indirectness employed by the Arabic (L1) speakers in their production of English refusals" [32]. This study showed that for these groups of users of English as a foreign language, English was used at work, and that language proficiency could "contribute to a more appropriate level of directness in a non-native language" [32]. As a result, the groups' previous experiences have an impact regarding how they handle requests and refusals in English as a foreign language. English uses both direct and indirect requests, and choosing the appropriate type of request has to do with the relationship between the speakers. Thus, the Hebrew group use more direct requests when having informal relationships with work colleagues, and the Arab group used more indirect refusals if they had studied English for more years. The presentation of this case study shows that previous experience is used when speaking a foreign language.

2.2 Multilingualism and multiculturalism as features of contemporary, everyday culture

When teaching and learning foreign languages, we need to take into account the social and cultural realities. In our case, we need to take into consideration the contemporary context, where, according to source [33] one of the "striking" features "of globalisation is the impact of multilingualism, and the related phenomenon of multiculturalism." What is more, contemporary societies are diverse, as far as both languages and cultures are concerned: "Very few contemporary societies can be considered homogenous; they are increasingly diverse, whether in the languages spoken or in the ways that people live and express themselves (their cultures)." The foreign language lessons need, thus, to help students prepare for the reality of a world where multilingualism is a necessary skill and a necessary tool for adapting to the everyday life. As a result, it is considered normal in today's world to know at least two or even more languages: "Speaking two or more languages is the natural way of life for three-quarters of the human race. [This] principle ... has been obscured in parts of Europe as a consequence of colonial history" [34]. The current world asks for intercultural communication skills, where knowledge of other cultures cannot be completely separated from knowledge of other languages. Research [29] mentions the need to help students "come into contact with a number of different languages and cultures as early on as possible", since the students should adapt to a multicultural and multilinguistic world, where they will cooperate with other cultures when at work. Source [33] draws attention to the issue that certain languages are disappearing, that some are spoken by a very small number of persons, while English has known a rise as a globally spoken language. However, across the world "there are still over 7,000 distinct languages spoken", and in some countries multiple languages are spoken.

In today's world, both knowing other languages, most often English, the global language, as well as others is necessary. However, it is still necessary to maintain a connection with our native language and culture. As an example given by source [33], we can see Welsh identity as being connected to both culture, values, mindset, traditions, as well as to language: "To be Welsh is an experience. To both be and speak Welsh is a related, more robust experience. Each time we erase one of those options from the world of human experience, we lose an incomprehensibly complex realm of knowledge" [35]. The same experience could be applied to any other native language and culture.

Multilingualism and multiculturalism refer to both respecting one's native language and culture, as well as to showing respect and understanding towards other languages and cultures.

The European Commission views the multicultural language classroom as a means for the teacher to help students "value diversity" and to incorporate "cultural diversity in their teachings" [36]. Their document focuses on issues regarding the inclusion of migrant children in the process of foreign language teaching. The European Commission believes that migrant children should maintain their mother language, together with its culture, while learning another language. This is why, according to [37], they will need to interact with their family and community.

The European Union also "encourages multilingualism by espousing a policy which requires citizens to learn at least three languages, i.e. two languages in addition to their respective mother tongue" [38]. As a result, foreign language teaching should take this rule into account, by having schools and universities develop curricula that help students achieve this goal. The researcher mentioned in [39] draw attention to the reality that students of a foreign language already know at least one more language, other than their mother language. This means that "they already have an array of linguistic and cognitive skills that may prove very useful if they are adequately exploited during the language learning process". Yet, the issue is that "the particular characteristics of multilingual learners often go unnoticed by foreign language teachers". The researcher mentioned in [39] believe that teacher should be aware, and make use in the foreign language classroom, of the "multilingual learners' metalinguistic awareness, for example by adopting strategies such as reactivating prior linguistic knowledge and exploring the formal differences and similarities between the languages present in the classroom". Most of the times, it is useful for learners to start from what they already know, and then build further knowledge of the foreign language they are currently learning in class. What is more, the human mind tends to work by categorizing knowledge and experience, meaning by ordering knowledge and experience in various groups and based on various features. The language learners' mind works in the same way, as their previous knowledge of other languages can be considered part of their experience in the domain. They may order language features by types of family the language belongs to, for example to the Romance or to the Germanic family. Due to this, they can establish similarities and differences regarding vocabulary and grammatical structures, or these can be pointed out to the by the teacher during class. The teacher can also draw on his own background with previously known languages to give examples of how he/she uses previous knowledge to help him/her in learning a new language.

2.3 Disadvantages of multilingualism: language transfer (language interference)

As we have seen from the research presented in this chapter, in spite of all the previously presented benefits, there are also disadvantages to using multilingualism during classes. One of these disadvantages can be found under the form of language transfer (also known as language interference), which is explained by

source [40] as follows: "when attempting to communicate in a second language, learners often 'transfer' elements of their native language onto the speech patterns of the target language". Language transfer is an issue that is also raised in [41], which can be negative when it is "the sign of the lack of some kind of linguistic and/or pragmatic knowledge and that takes the form of grammatical and/or lexical mistakes and errors." In some cases, language interference can lead to incorrect use of a foreign language. This could be the reason why certain teachers avoid using the students' previous knowledge of other foreign languages in their classroom activities. However, language transfer, or language interference, can happen in the case of any foreign language learners, even if they are multilingual or not. This has been identified as one of the common problems of learning a foreign language. In the case of multilinguals, we can speak of second language transfer while learning a third language [42]. While learning a second language, the leaner will go back to the knowledge of the first language, and try to fit in the new language according to the patterns of the first, already known, one. While learning a third language, the learner will go back to the most recently learned foreign language and try to use the same, already known, pattern. This type of mechanism that is visible in the learning of other languages can show that language learners set previous knowledge and experience with languages as a basis for acquiring their new knowledge. At some points relying on what they already know can hinder the process. This could be regarded as a difficulty to adapt to the new reality. An example of transference from a learner's second language to his/her currently learned third language is given in [43]: "a native speaker of English with French L2 and German L3 says: *Tu as mein Fax bekommen*, maintaining correct German syntax but unintentionally producing the French personal pronoun and auxiliary [43]."

Source [43] enumerates some factors that cause multilingual speakers to mix the currently known language with previously learned ones, namely the language learned right before the one they are currently learning. Among these factors, the following could be found: "typological similarity between languages and the speaker's level of proficiency", "the degree of markedness and the degree of morpheme boundedness of individual lexical items". Other factors include the "foreign language effect" [43] and the "last language effect" [44]. Those factors that are specific to using second language knowledge to third language use are, according to [43], the following: "cognitive mode, language typology, proficiency, and frequency of use."

However, even transfer from previously known languages is not accepted by all researchers. Source [45], for instance, believe that there is a full transfer among languages, meaning that "all syntactic properties of the L1 initially constitute a base for the newly developing grammar, which is constructed with the involvement of Universal Grammar (UG)" [46]. Other researchers believe that there is not a complete transfer, for example they [47, 48] claim that only transfer of lexical categories can occur, while Eubank [49, 50] claims that lexical and functional categories can both be transferred. The researchers mentioned in [46] claim that the learners can build "an interlanguage grammar (ILG) on the basis of L2 input and of UG" following "this initial transfer phase". Other researchers [51, 52] believe that there is no transfer occurring from previously known languages. According to these researchers, "neither the L1, nor UG are involved; there are only general (cognitive) learning strategies that guide the learner in the development of a new grammar" [46]. Source [53] claims that "UG alone is involved, and thus the learner will initially create an ILG drawing on UG options" [46].

There are, thus, competitive views regarding whether language transfer occurs or not, among researchers. Foreign language teachers will rely on their personal

observations of and experience with a certain group of learners, and try to make them learn a foreign language efficiently.

In the case of using the first language in the foreign language classroom, according to [54], some researchers believe that it is beneficial for the teacher to make references to it, as "learners acquire a second language by using the knowledge they already have of their native language". Learners "use structures from their first language that are comparable to the second language transfer forms and meanings while attempting to read, speak or write the second language." From this viewpoint, another previously known language does not hinder the learning process of a new language, but on the contrary, it helps learners.

The research observations presented in this section regarding language transfer refer to the linguistic level, to issues of grammar and vocabulary. Other aspects of multilingualism should also be taken into consideration, especially the cultural and political aspects. The current cultural context depends on the values of diversity put forth at a political level by the European Comission. While the students may not find that knowing other languages can help them with learning a new one in class, they may be taught to take into consideration their previous experience to better understand the way that different cultures communicate differently, by using different phrases, and also non-verbal hints, because they belong to a certain category of cultures. As a result, they may communicate more or less directly or indirectly. Students may also be encouraged to learn more languages since it is believed that they will be helped to better understand the frames of minds of other cultures, due to language and culture being interrelated. Some languages can show specific aspects of certain cultures, such as the way that their members perceive colors. For example, Greeks have, in their language, two terms for blue, light and dark blue ("ghalazio" and "ble"). After staying for a long time in the United Kingdom, for instance, where there is only one term for the two colors, namely "blue", the Greeks will perceive light and dark blue as more similar.

As a result, depending on their background, whether they are studying humanities or engineering, students can be made aware of the relationships between different cultures and languages. Humanities students can be interested in the theoretical linguistics aspects, as well as in the culture and civilization aspects that have led to the cultural differences, while engineering students may be more interested in the consequences regarding the practical, conversational part and in culture and civilization aspects. The author of the chapter teaches English seminars and a course in Culture and Civilization to engineering students, at the Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest. The focus when teaching these students foreign languages and culture is on examples regarding communication and the relationships between the interlocutors, whether they are more or less familiar, or whether the conversation takes place in a business context or in a family or friends circle. At the Faculty of Engineering in Foreign Languages there are many foreign students, from all over the world; however, since the author of this chapter does not know all their native languages, and since not all the students have the same background regarding other known languages, teaching takes place only in English. However, during classes, cultural aspects of communication can be presented, for instance regarding direct and indirect communication cultures, together with references regarding various structures of different languages, as well as formulas of addressing someone. For instance, in Japanese, there are honorifics, used for addressing someone function of rank and relationship, as a sign of respect. In English, we can address anyone with "you", as the culture is more egalitarian. Japan is, traditionally, a high-power distance culture, according to Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions [55]. This means that they will show respect for anyone in a position of authority, in the family, at school, and at work. In French and Romanian, we also have the

pronouns *tu* vs. *vous*, *tu* vs. *dvs.*, to be used function of whom we are addressing. For the English language, we may add respectful words such as "Sir", "Madam", and "Professor", instead of having a specific set of pronouns like in Japanese, French and Romanian. However, with Romanian students studying engineering at other specialties, such as Hydrotechnics, knowledge of several languages can be used when students are given glossaries for technical terms, for instance in English, Romanian, French, and German. They may find it useful to know the same term in several languages, if they wish to search for scientific articles on the topic, in other languages they know. This can be useful for projects at university, but also for projects when they have a job.

2.4 How native language affects language transfer in a multilingual setting

While knowing several languages can help students learn a new language together with other foreign students, since this means that they are already familiar with various grammatical notions they should pay attention to, there will always be the interference, at some points, of the native language over the newly acquired language. Knowledge of several languages works in the following way on learners: "The most central difference between transfer in SLA and transfer in TLA is the fact that the learner can draw on multiple background languages when encountering a gap in the target language (TL)" [56]. The area that is mainly affected by language transfer is vocabulary: "While transfer can occur at different linguistic levels (e.g. syntax and phonology), it is especially interesting in the case of lexis. Vocabulary is the main carrier of meaning and central to language learning" [56]. Among the factors that can influence the extent of the transfer are the learners' high proficiency in the background language, how recently they have used a certain language, how close the learners believe a certain language they already know is to the language they are currently learning (based on experience with the new language or based on expectations), as well as item-specific transferability, meaning that learners may believe that a certain item could be found in a close form in a certain language they already [56]. Thus, language transfer may not be related only to transfer from the native language, especially in the case of multilinguals [57]. What is more, the process of language transfer can be both spontaneous and strategic [56].

Source [56] presents the study done on a group of learners that share, as much as possible, the same background and previously known languages, and which were from Luxemburg. The country has three official languages: Luxemburgish, German and French. These learners were 79 high-school students in their second year of learning English. Of course, they also knew other languages in various proportions. The author of the study noticed form-based transfer in the form of borrowing, foreignising, spelling, but also meaning-based transfer, in the form of lexeme matching, but also semantic extensions, combined transfer of compounds, and others. These students were using their main known languages as background knowledge from where to get help in situations they did not know how to deal with in English.

For the Asian learners of English, English is a language that is used in Asia more often with other speakers of Asian languages than with speakers from English-speaking countries such as the US or the UK [58]. The existence of Asian varieties of English may also influence the perception of English by Asian learners, and also their language transfer. For instance, "Very often, Asian speakers of English deviate from American or British norms of communication and thereby understand each other and establish rapport" [58]. The main issue with Asian varieties of English is that native language transfer is considered normal, and that it forms the specific of Asian varieties of English. No improvement is asked from the Asian speakers as far as Asian English varieties are concerned. The same holds true for African varieties of English.

Thus, to some extent, when it comes to English, every speaker in the world has come into contact with it under one form or another. In some cases, native language transfer issues are accepted. With respect to learning other languages, by Westerners or Easterners, most issues related to transfer from first language are related to the subjectivity of the learner, to how he/she perceives other languages or to what he/she expects from them, based on his/her background of previously known languages.

3. Multilingualism as fact or multilingualism as political construct?

The question is which studies regarding multilingualism should be trusted: those regarding the benefits of multilingualism, or those claiming that monolinguals and multilinguals, or bilinguals and multilinguals can have the same skills? Is multilingualism just a trend supported by the European Commission, and part of the current values regarding diversity and multiculturalism, and respect for these, or is it more?

The answers could be given on the basis of personal experience of both students and teachers. The answers could also be given due to individual skills, since certain persons seem to be more gifted than others at learning foreign languages. One should consider the factors that can influence the results of all the experiments presented in the research papers, and also the limitations pointed out by the authors of the studies. At this point, studies with various groups of learners that are multilingual may seem dependent on other variables, while evidence coming from studying the brain of multilinguals can seem more convincing, as physical evidence can be given. For instance, according to [59], native languages and languages learned later activate the same areas of the brain and use the same neural resources. However, it is not known "whether the brain processes these languages in the same way or not." Such findings could help support the arguments that knowledge of previously known languages could help learners in their study of a new language. Yet, researchers have not agreed whether all languages can be processed by the brain in a similar way. This could suggest that a multilingual may not learn any other language with more ease.

After all, what is convincing evidence depends on the perception of the person looking for evidence, whether the respective person is more inclined to believe in studying the behavior and skills of a group of persons or is more inclined to look for physical, scientific proof that can be explained by looking at the human physical brain. Most likely, most foreign language teachers will judge these matters based on their own experience with teaching groups of multilingual, bilingual, or monolingual students. They will take action regarding the way they can teach their students efficiently considering the situation at the very moment.

In some cases, multilingualism depends on an individual's language learning skills, more than on anything else. What is more, some teaching methods can prove to be more efficient than others, and more suitable for learners to better understand the respective language. In other cases, knowing more languages can be an imposition regarding the place where someone lives, if there are several official languages.

Schools and universities are reflections of the rules of the culture and society students and teachers live, and so certain languages can be studied.

Therefore, multilingualism can be the result of various circumstances: values imposed by the European Comission, by the culture someone lives in, as well as of personal preferences.

4. Conclusions

The chapter has taken into consideration aspects of multilingualism in relation to teaching foreign languages especially, while also taking into account aspects related to contemporary cultural values and communication styles that are culturally related. It has also presented examples of research and group experiments regarding the extent to which multilinguals use previous knowledge of foreign languages, and the extent to which it may or may not help them in acquiring a new language.

The techniques used by the teacher with students having a multilingual background should be adapted to the students' age. While intuitive comparisons with other languages with concrete examples of conversations can work for any age, explanations that are more theoretical, and dealing with notions of culture and civilizations, as well as pragmatics, are more suitable for university-level students. At the same time, the teacher should also take into consideration the background of the students, even at university level, and needs. Some university students may have a technical background, if they are studying Engineering, and only having English language seminars once a week, like students at the Technical University of Civil Engineering where the author of this chapter teaches. These students may not be interested in the theoretical aspects related to linguistics, and may instead look for a more practical teaching approach. They may be given conversational examples, with explanations related to the notions they study related to Culture and Civilization during the English seminar. The focus is especially on contemporary and everyday culture and civilization, since they should know about today's contemporary world. Aspects regarding cultural differences are most important, since they will come into contact with other cultures during university years, as well as at work.

While according to various research papers, students may or may not benefit from previous knowledge of other languages, at the level of grammar, vocabulary, and language structure, they can benefit from practical examples given as comparisons of previous known languages with the language they are currently studying. The students can use previous knowledge of other languages and cultures in such a way so as to become aware of cultural differences and to adapt to a world that values multiculturalism.

Multilingualism and multiculturalism are related, and through multilingualism students can be drawn into the topic of multiculturalism, starting from what they already know, with their experiences as language learners. Multiculturalism and multilingualism are both key aspects of the world they live in and they should know about. They also need to understand this world, and one step is to sympathize with different cultures, first of all through communication. Communication itself is dependent on cultural differences, as it can be more direct or more indirect. After all, communication remains the main purpose of learning any foreign language for any foreign language learners. Moreover, communication is regarded as one of the key aspects in today's world, under all its forms, personal, public, spoken, written, printed books or social media. It is believed that our contemporary age is the age of communication, especially due to all the possibilities of technology, that bring us all together. Multilingualism and multiculturalism invite us to cooperate, especially through efficient communication, cultural awareness and cultural empathy.

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