

Developing children's language awareness: switching codes in the language classroom

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This article examines how learning an additional language can positively affect children's opinions and feelings about languages and how this process can be enriched when different languages – namely, the additional language and the children's L1s – are present and used in the classroom in an informed way. It is hypothesised that this will benefit children as language learners and, ultimately, as learners. A qualitative and quantitative study was carried out with 25 young learners for a school term. Their L1s (Catalan and Spanish) were brought into the English classroom and activities incorporating translation and codeswitching (CS), namely the pedagogically based CS, were developed. This switching of codes was promoted by the teacher but used by the students. Based on the research results, the article concludes by describing and discussing the positive development observed in the children's language awareness and plurilingual competence.

Keywords: beginning learners; codeswitching (CS); third language acquisition; metalinguistic awareness; plurilingualism; translation tasks

Introduction

The research that is described in this article¹ is in line with the new perspective towards languages and language teaching defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) in the sense that a broad look at languages and language teaching and learning is taken. The same perspective is followed in the Catalan Primary School Curriculum (Departament d'Educació, 2009), which is the curriculum that applies to the context where this research has taken place. Some of the aims that are included in these documents and that are relevant to this study are the following:

- (1) The aim of language teaching is the progressive command of languages, rather than the more traditional term acquisition, which may be understood as posing more emphasis on actively learning the language;
- (2) The plurilingual and intercultural competences need to be developed, together with the more traditionally used and also more limited communicative competence;
- (3) Learning foreign languages enhances the mother tongue;
- (4) Learning languages is a privilege that opens doors to other cultures.

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All in all, we are talking about placing the language teaching focus on language command, language awareness, plurilingualism and interaction. It is clear that taking this new perspective into the classroom goes beyond teaching language for communicating and involves more than the linguistic skills. However, it is also clear

that new didactic proposals are required (Jessner, 1999; Noguerol, n.d.) and classroom-based research, specifically related to how the different languages the children have available can be effectively used in the teaching process, is needed (Cook, 2001; Jessner, 1999; Macaro, 2001, 2003, 2005; Turnbull, 2001; among others).

What does 'using the L1' mean?

It will be argued here that a possible feature of these new didactic proposals and object of classroom-based research may be related to finding an informed way of using the children's mother tongue/s in the additional language classroom. Bringing the L1 into the classroom is too broad an expression and could be misunderstood and improperly used if not defined accurately. In the context of the research described in this article, by bringing the L1 into the classroom, reference could be made to two different aspects: what is done with the L1 and how the L1 is used. Regarding the former, the following possibilities can occur:

- (1) Using the L1 as a management strategy (by the teacher) or as a learning strategy (by the students) (Cook, 2001).
- (2) Designing and carrying out activities that incorporate translation as a pedagogical tool and as a communication strategy that reflects the explicit use of more than one language and helps to develop cognitive skills, creativity, self-confidence and risk-taking while promoting diversity and cooperation in the classroom (Cook, 2002, 2007; Cummins, 2005, 2008; Gonza'lez Davies, 2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2007, forthcoming; Gonza'lez Davies & Scott-Tennent, 2009; Owen, 2003).
- (3) Establishing a language code in the classroom that explicitly uses and models codeswitching (CS), which is presented as a naturally occurring communication strategy typical of plurilingual speech (Giauque & Ely, 1990; Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2002; Macaro, 2001, 2003, 2005).

Regarding the second aspect (how the L1 is used), two options are possible: the use of the L1 may be directed and informed, or spontaneous. The argument here is that, even though spontaneous use of the L1 should be accepted if we believe in turning the language classroom into an authentic plurilingual space of communication, it is only the directed and informed use of the L1, based on pedagogic principles, which can make the teaching process more effective in a tutored, and therefore non naturalistic, setting. In this sense, designing and carrying out didactic activities where several languages are used and thus the possibility of comparing and analysing similarities and differences (that is, helping language awareness and plurilingual competence develop) becomes one of the language teacher's aims. Taking into account that, already in 1972, Lambert and Tucker noted that students in a French immersion programme spontaneously engaged in a form of contrastive linguistics where they compared aspects of French and English despite the fact that the languages were clearly compartmentalised and comparison was not promoted in any way, Cummins (2005, 2008) argues that this comparison would be much more fruitful if it were systematically encouraged and supported by teachers. By now, many are equating the language learner with a potential plurilingual speaker and, thus, the additional language classroom as a place where interculturality and multilingualism (Alco'n & Safont, 2007), additive bilingualism (Baetens Beardsmore, 1986; Grosjean, 2001), compound bilingualisation (Widdowson, 2003), multicompetence (Cook, 2003, 2005, 2007), acting interculturally (Byram, 2008) or emergent bilingualism (García, 2009) can and should be developed. Based on all the above, it is argued here that a feature of these new didactic proposals and object of classroom-based research may be related to finding an informed way of using the children's mother tongue/s in the additional language classroom, that is, of creating opportunities to switch codes or to translanguange (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García, 2009). This can be done, at

least, in two different ways: first, by using translation, and the specific model followed here is TOLC, which is defined as 'Translation for Other Learning Contexts (...) translation to acquire linguistic mediation skills and intercultural competence in fields other than Translation Studies' (González Davies, forthcoming); second, by using CS and, specifically, the pedagogically based CS. This CS does not respond to personal, conversational, social or topic-based needs, which are some of the key elements that are used to describe CS in the sociolinguistic literature (Gumperz, 1982; Myers Scotton, 1993; Poplack, 1980). It is rather a CS designed by the additional language teacher as an aid for language learning: the teacher promotes it for purely pedagogic reasons and it gives the students the chance to confront and compare their languages. The aim is to create opportunities for the students to use their languages in class by creating new and informed routes to go from language to language, that is, by giving the students the chance to translanguage (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Garcí'a, 2009). This is done without changing the classroom language i.e. English and thus at the same time provides the students with the immersion-like context they require for learning. The underlying idea here is that learners in this age-group (7- to 8-year olds) would still benefit from an immersion-like context where they can make the most of contextual clues (i.e. non-verbal communication or visual support) while they also begin to be ready to move further in their concept development abilities and to transfer knowledge from and to the languages they know (Skinner, 1985). In other words, the controlled use of TOLC (González Davies, forthcoming) and the pedagogically based CS would be didactic strategies to promote switching codes in the language classroom.

L1 in additional language classrooms: state-of-the-art

For a long time, the use of the L1 in the additional language classroom has been negatively considered. There have been more or less extremist views, but the underlying idea has always been that if the L1 could not be avoided, it should, at least, be kept to a minimum. Macaro (2001, p. 535) described clearly the three positions that have been held over time and grouped them as follows:

- (1) The virtual position. The classroom is like the target country. Therefore, we should aim at total exclusion of the L1. There is no pedagogical value in L1 use. The L1 can be excluded from the foreign language classroom as long as the teacher is skilled enough.
- (2) The maximal position. There is no pedagogical value in L1 use. However, perfect teaching and learning conditions do not exist and therefore, teachers have to resort to the L1.
- (3) The optimal position. There is some pedagogical value in L1 use. Some aspects of learning may actually be enhanced by use of the L1. There should therefore, be a constant exploration of pedagogical principles regarding whether and in what ways L1 is justified.

In the last two decades or so, there have appeared a growing number of authors who, supported by research, have started to defend the Optimal Position described above. The key ideas that have been given in support of somehow using the children's mother tongues in the classroom are the following:

- (1) Using the L1 in the classroom is part of natural practice, a classroom resource and a time-efficient strategy promoted by many teachers (Atkinson, 1987, 1993; Cook, 2001; Hagen, 1992; Macaro, 1997);
- (2) L1 should be used as students' previous knowledge in order to scaffold new learning and, based on cognitive theories, in order to support learning (Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; Brooks & Donato, 1994; Long, 1996; Ringbom, 1987; Skinner, 1985; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Van Lier, 1995; Villamil & De Guerrero, 1996);

- (3) L1, when given the form of CS or translation, can turn the language classroom into a more authentic plurilingual setting where the appropriate communicative strategies are modelled and used. This, in turn, may increase communication possibilities and may help classroom atmosphere improve (Alco'n & Safont, 2007; Giauque & Ely, 1990; Gonza'lez Davies, 2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2007; Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2002);
- (4) Bringing more languages into the classroom is essential to help develop plurilingual and pluricultural competences, understood as 'the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent, has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures' (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 168) (Byram, 2008);
- (5) The L1 should be given a role in the additional language classroom for historical or socio-political reasons, especially in contexts where heritage languages are involved (i.e. to counterbalance linguistic imperialism practiced by stronger languages or to re-establish power relations among different languages in a classroom) (Auerbach, 1993; Belz, 2002; Phillipson, 1992).

Method

The research presented here was carried out with the belief that the English teacher in a Primary School² should and could have a role that goes beyond teaching purely linguistic points (Byram, 2008). It is precisely in the additional language classroom where children can face a reality that is plurilingual and that, therefore, is richer than a monolingual one. It is in this setting where they can be encouraged to work with the different languages they have available in order to enrich their learning process, taking into account that advancing in the knowledge of any language – be it their mother tongue or a third language – is going to benefit the others (Cook, 2003).

These children will eventually need to be plurilingual and pluricultural speakers because they will live in a society that is increasingly so. They will need to be more and more multicompetent (Cook, 2003, 2005, 2007) and the Primary School should begin to prepare them for the challenge of social and economic mobility in their future.

Participants

The research was carried out at a school in Barcelona with children in their second year of Primary (that is, 7- and 8-year-olds) in the second term (January-March) of the school year 2007-2008. In this school, there are four groups of 25 children per year, which means that there are 100 children in their second year. The school language is Catalan, although Spanish is, as well as English, introduced in kindergarten.

The researcher was also the English teacher for these four groups, and had been their teacher the year before as well. She is herself bilingual (Catalan and Spanish) and proficient in English and French. She was trained as a translator and as an English teacher and had an eight-year experience of teaching in Primary Education before starting this research.

The second-year primary children had begun learning English in their last year of kindergarten and so this was their third year learning English. They had always been in very active and communicative English lessons, where the focus was the oral language, particularly listening to and singing or acting out songs and stories and working with vocabulary.

Out of the four groups in their second year, one was chosen, for purely practical reasons, to carry out the research with. It was with these 25 children (11 boys and 14 girls) that Catalan and Spanish were introduced in the classroom as pedagogically based CS and in order to teach the contents that had been planned for the second

term: food and drink, and parts of the face.³ They were based on the textbook that the children were using at the time (Maidment & Roberts, 2003) thus underlining an ecological approach to the research project. With the other three groups, exactly the same contents were taught but with no reference at all to Catalan and Spanish, which is actually what they were used to.

Regarding the home language of the children in the treatment group, 13 report to speak Catalan at home, two speak Spanish and nine speak both. All can be considered, however, bilingual.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses underlying this study relate to the belief that an informed use of the children's mother tongue has positive consequences on the children's English oral comprehension and vocabulary acquisition and production, as well as on the children's motivation and self-esteem and on the classroom atmosphere. They are the following:

- (1) The use of the pedagogically based CS will improve oral comprehension in English;
- (2) The use of the pedagogically based CS will improve English vocabulary acquisition and production;
- (3) The use of the pedagogically based CS will increase students' motivation for learning;
- (4) The use of the pedagogically based CS will increase students' self-esteem;
- (5) The use of the pedagogically based CS will improve classroom atmosphere.

Bringing more languages into the additional language classroom, then, is hypothesised to favour the learning process at the cognitive (1 and 2), the metacognitive (3) and the socioaffective (4 and 5) levels.

Rationale and sequencing of the activities

As for the activities combining the three languages, they were created by the teacher based on her teaching experience and the knowledge of the children, and also on authors such as Duff (1989), Deller and Rinvoluceri (2002), González Davies (2004) and Mallol (2006), among others. Two examples will be described next.

The first example was based on an activity suggested in the children's textbook where they could read and listen to the following chant (Maidment & Roberts, 2003, p. 19):

I don't like coffee
I don't like tea
I like lemonade
Lemonade for me

After working on the vocabulary through a game in the three languages that included listening to and singing the chant in English and reading it together in the three languages, the children were asked to work collaboratively in a plurilingual singing activity. The children had the following version of the chant on the whiteboard:

I don't like
I don't like
I like
... .. for me!

They had to translate this version into Catalan and Spanish and fill in the blanks with new food or drinks that would also be translated accordingly. They knew that,

afterwards, they had to sing the resulting three versions of the chant in front of their classmates and that they would be recorded.

Some of their written results were the following (mistakes and omissions included) (Table 1):

The children viewed this as a language activity. To the researcher, however, their final product was at least as relevant as the observation of their working process, the noting down of comments that the children made as they worked and afterwards and, last but not least, the self-corrections that were visible on their worksheets. They faced translation difficulties with some words and one recurrent problem was the omission of the article in the Catalan and Spanish texts (as can be seen in example 2 in Table 1), even though they said it when they were reading it aloud. In some groups, a child would realise the mistake and tell the others; in some others, the teacher would ask them to repeat the sentence again while following the written line with a finger. This made the children realise there was a word missing. This is a good

Table 1. Chant: example of written results.

Example 1 Example 2

I don't like coffee I don't like fish I don't like tea I don't like coffee I like rice I like pasta Rice for me Pasta for me No m'agrada el cafe' No m'agrada [...] formatge No m'agrada el te' No m'agrada [...] te`a M'agrada l'arros M'agrada [...] llet Arros per mi Llet per mi No me gusta el cafe' No me gusta [...] yogurt No me gusta el te' No me gusta [...] limonada Me gusta el arroz Me gusta la pasta Arroz para mi Pasta para mi

example of the sort of teacher participation that was promoted in the classroom: the teacher as a guide, as a helper, rather than the teacher who explicitly informs the children about what to do. The reasoning behind this was based on the idea that 'the period between 2 and 7 years of age is a time during which children's knowledge about language and about the language(s) they hear around them develops rapidly and, to a very large extent, without instruction or intention' (Nicholas & Lightbown, 2008, p. 39) so, in a setting that is not naturalistic, the teacher chose to guide children towards discovery, rather than to instruct them.

Taking all this into account, it can be argued that the children were immersed in a collaborative learning process that led them to start thinking about and questioning some of the characteristics of the three languages they had at hand. And, most importantly, this happened spontaneously. They were not told to start thinking about the language: they just did it because they found themselves facing three languages at once.

The second example is an activity called 'What have you got in your restaurant? Writing a plurilingual menu'. In this case, students were shown a menu like the one below (Table 2) and were asked to produce something similar on big cards and working in groups.

An example of their results is the one shown below (Figure 1). It is worth highlighting how their translations involve at least two difficulties that did actually arise and were talked about among themselves and also with the teacher. The first has to do with word order⁴ and it can actually be seen in the corrections the children made in the first example, where in Catalan and Spanish they talk about gelat de llimona and helado de limo`n, respectively; and, before they stopped to think about it, they were about to translate it into English as Icecream Lemon. The second difficulty has to do

Table 2. Plurilingual menu.

Cristina's restaurant Menu
 Pasta pasta pasta

Rice with tomato arro`s amb toma`quet arroz con tomate
Fish peix pescado
Hamburger hamburguesa hamburguesa
Yoghurt iogurt yogur
Banana pla`tan pla`tano

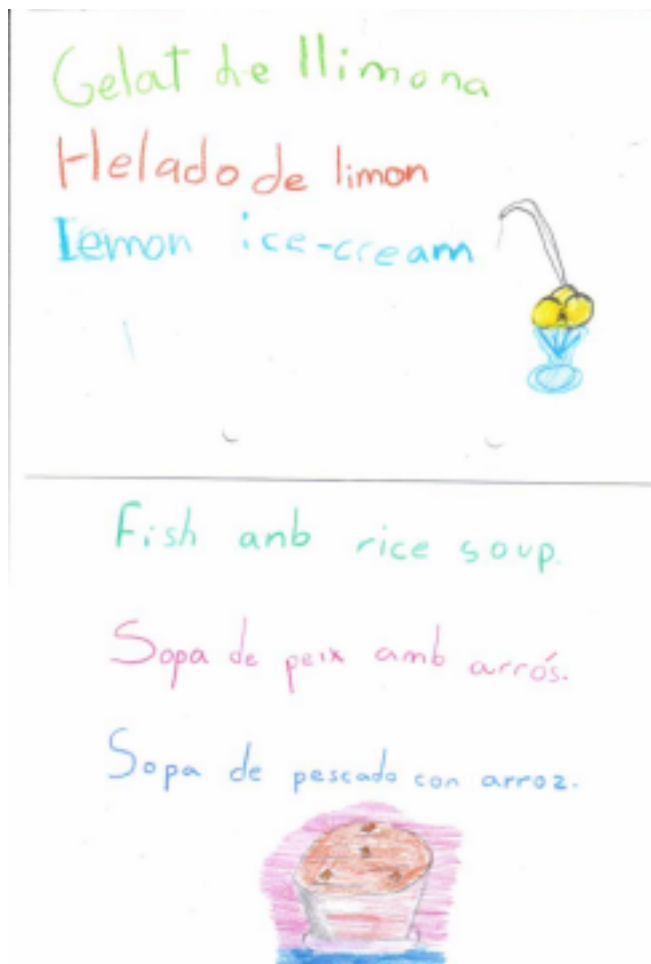


Figure 1. Plurilingual menu: written results.

with the English word fish, which in Spanish can be translated as pescado (the fish you eat, has been fished) and pez (the fish that is alive, has not been fished). The choice was not clear to everyone⁵ and so the children did talk about which was the right word and why, which also favoured collaborative work and L1 awareness and improvement.

Instruments

Four of the instruments used in the research will be described here⁶: the activity survey submitted to the students after the lessons with plurilingual activities, the recorded group interview carried out after these lessons, the language tests used (pre test and post-test) and the motivation surveys (pre-test and post-test).

Activity survey

A survey was submitted to the children every time they had several languages involved in a lesson. The survey was in Catalan and was designed to be appealing

and easy to answer by 7- or 8-year-olds. Each time that it was suitable, students were asked to say yes or no and explain why. It included the following questions:

- (1) Did you like the activity?
- (2) What did you like the most?
- (3) What did you like the least?
- (4) Did anything surprise you?
- (5) Would you like to do it again?
- (6) Would you do anything differently?
- (7) What did you learn?

Recorded group interview

After each lesson, an interview with a small group of children (between 4 and 6) was recorded. The interview was conducted in Catalan and it always began by the teacher asking the children to describe what they had done in class. If necessary, the teacher asked for greater detail. Next, she always asked them whether they had enjoyed the activities and the lesson. After making sure that the discussion of these two aspects had been recorded, the teacher allowed the children to speak about the activities quite freely.

Language tests

To test language acquisition, a written test (Roberts, 2003, p. 124) was carried out by the students both before (pre-test) and after the unit (post-test). The test had three exercises and each one was worth six points, so the highest score that could be obtained was 18. Answers were considered correct even if they included spelling mistakes, as writing and spelling are not major aims with children in this age group.

The first exercise was a listening and discriminating activity where students had to listen to a short dialogue and understand whether a girl liked or did not like some food. They had to record their answers by putting a ✓ for yes or a X for no in the box next to the picture. Therefore, this exercise tested children's comprehension of short texts including the key vocabulary.

In the second exercise, children had pictures and words for different food items and they had to match them by drawing a line between the two. Thus, this exercise tested vocabulary recognition and matching.

Finally, in the third exercise children had pictures to find out which food items a boy liked or did not like. They had to complete short sentences (i.e. I like ... /I don't like ...) with the appropriate vocabulary. Thus, the exercise tested vocabulary recognition and production.

Motivation survey

A survey was submitted to the children at the beginning (pre-test) and at the end of the term (post-test) in order to find out more information regarding motivational aspects. This survey was also in Catalan and designed to be appealing and easy to answer. It included the following questions:

- (1) Do you like learning English? Why?
- (2) What do you like the most about learning English? Why?
- (3) What do you like the least about learning English? Why?
- (4) How do you prefer to work in class? Alone? With a partner? In groups? (5) Did anything surprise you this term? What?

Results

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data reveal three interesting outcomes: first, language acquisition as such did not vary significantly when comparing the treatment group with the control groups. However, it did not get worse either. The students who carried out a plurilingual set of activities learnt as much English as the ones who worked only in English. Second, what seemed to improve were the aspects related to students' motivation, self-esteem and classroom atmosphere, as hypothesised. Finally, there was an unexpected outcome concerning the development of language awareness, that is, the ability to think and talk about languages and the language learning process. These outcomes will be described in greater detail next.

Cognitive aspects: language acquisition

Regarding language acquisition, group mean totals were calculated for the written pre-test and the post-test and the difference in the results between the two was compared. A t-test was used to determine whether the difference between the treatment group mean and the control groups mean in the pre-test and in the post test could be considered meaningful. The difference in the pre-test (treatment group vs. control groups) was not statistically relevant, as the final value is higher than 0.05 (0.119), which means that the initial language knowledge is similar enough to make the comparison possible. Regarding the difference in the post-test (treatment group vs. control groups), the statistics show that all groups have improved, although the difference in improvement is not statistically relevant either (0.208). In conclusion, this means there are no significative differences in learning when comparing the treatment group with the control groups.

Socioaffective and metacognitive aspects: motivation, self-esteem, classroom atmosphere and language awareness

Analysing the activity survey filled in by the children after doing the first activity described above (the chant) and in answer to the first question (did you like the activity?) the answers (24 in total) were as follows⁷:

20 yes ('perque ma agrà molt' [because I liked it a lot], 'perque es molt divertida' [because it is fun], 'perque em canta' [because we sang]); 1 no ('parque tanies que esquira molo be' [because you had to write very well]); so, so ('sou sou perque` no u se' [so so because I don't know]; 'sou sou perque amb vaig aquiboca' [so so because I made a mistake]; 'ni si ni no perque` em va agradar fer-ho en grup i cantar-la pro posarla en tots els idiomes no' [so so because I liked to do it in groups and sing it but not to write the chant in all the languages]).

What is relevant about these answers is the high number of students who were motivated by the activity and enjoyed it and also the fact that in the four answers that were not positive, only one of them is directly related to the fact that there were three languages involved in the activity.

Regarding the second activity described above (the plurilingual menu activity), the answers to the first survey question (did you like the activity?) were as follows:

22 yes ('si perque` amb els companys triaves el menu' [yes because you had to choose the menu with your classmates], 'si perque es molt divertida' [because it was great fun], 'si perque` em treballat en grup' [because we worked in groups]);

1 no ('perque em feia mal el dit i perque no em deixaven escriure' [no because my finger hurt and they didn't let me write anything], 'no' [however, when asked

'would you like to do it again?' I would love to ...];
1 so, so ('haxi haxi perque yo no he ascrit' [so so because I couldn't write anything]).

Again, the number of positive answers is much greater than the rest and, in this case, none of the non-positive answers is related to the plurilingual nature of the activity.

As for the group interview conducted after the same lesson, and speaking about the first activity described above (the chant), one of the students gave the following answer, showing clearly her phonological awareness⁸:

T: How did you do, your group?

S1: Fine (shaking hand) jj well, except {name of a student}, he made a mistake and instead of tea he said te` [in Catalan]

Later on in the same conversation, the children were asked about their feelings regarding the activities where several languages are at play:

T: Had you done anything like this before in the English lessons?

All: No, no (shaking heads)

T: And do you like it?

All: Yes! (smiling)

T: Do you think you learn more or less English doing it like this?

S1: More!

All: More! (smiling)

What is very relevant about this conversation is how aware the children were about one of the students' pronunciation mistakes which had not been mentioned by the teacher in the classroom or outside and how motivated they were by the activity.

Regarding the second activity described above (the plurilingual menu), the following conversation took place:

T: Was it difficult to translate, your dessert? Or did you know right away? S1: We said icecream right away (moving hands)

T: Was it different or j similar in Catalan, in English and in Spanish? How was it in English, your dessert?

S2: Icecream j ai no, lemon icecream

T: And in Catalan?

S1 and S3: Gelat de llimona (at the same time)

T: And in Spanish?

S1 and S3: Helado de limo´n

T: And so is this different or alike?

S3: Well ...

S2: In Catalan and in Spanish they are quite similar

T: Yes, and what happens in English? There is something strange happening in English, what happens?

S3: In English it's quite different (moving head)

T: Why? How is it different?

S4: (rises hand)

T: (says S4's name)

S4: Because instead of (indicating changing position with hand movements) saying icecream and afterwards j lemonade (sic) j they say lemonade of icecream

T: We change the order, the order changes

S2: Yes, in English the order changes

T: The order changes in many things in English\

What is relevant about this conversation is how, by preparing an adequate language activity that visibly includes the L1 and giving the children the chance to talk about it, the teacher can help them think about and compare some structural features of the

Table 3. Sample of the treatment group's post-test answer to 'Do you like learning English? Why?'

Do you like English? Why?

1. Yes/we learn by playing games and is spoken in many different places in the world. 2. Yes/when I go to another country I will know how to speak and will be able to communicate. 3. Yes/like this I will be able to know all the languages.
4. Yes/I learn another language that many people talk and like this I will be able to communicate.

Table 4. Use of learn, know and communicate in the written post-tests. Answers including learn, know and communicate

Control group 1 5

Control group 2 9

Control group 3 2 Treatment group 14

languages, which is not the sort of work that is usually done in the additional language classroom with children of this age.

When analysing the answers given by the treatment group in the post-test motivation survey (see a sample in Table 3) to the question 'Do you like learning English? Why?', some aspects seem worth noting:

As indicated in bold, the children's recurrent use of words such as learn, know and communicate seemed especially relevant to their language awareness improvement. Some of the children in the other groups also used them, but in smaller numbers, as shown in the following table (Table 4):

When addressing the question 'Do you like English? Why?', the children in the control groups gave answers in their post-test such as (Table 5): Another question that was asked in the same post-test was 'Did anything surprise you this term? What?'. When answering this question, the treatment group gave the following answers (Table 6):

Several comments seem worth making. First, answers 1, 9 and 10 include a reflection regarding the nature of English. As has been mentioned before, this sort of reflection had never been explicitly encouraged or talked about in class. Second, answers 2, 3 and 11 relate working and playing, which is the methodology that has always been used in English class with these children and, however, they now seem to regard it as a novelty. Finally, answers 3, 5 and 8 mention the fact that languages other than English have been used in the classroom, which is definitely the novelty

that has been introduced and yet it is only mentioned by three children.

Next a sample of the answers given by the children in the other groups, where there are no comments similar to the ones described above, is shown (Table 7):

Discussion

As described above, the hypotheses underlying this research are the following:

- (1) The use of the pedagogically based CS will improve oral comprehension in English;

Table 5. Sample of answers (control group).

Control group 1	Yes/we do activities	
Yes/I learn another language		Yes/travelling
Control group 2	Yes/we do activities and doing English is very important	
Yes/I like to learn new things		
Yes/it's great fun and it will help us when we grow up		
Control group 3	Yes/we play games	
Yes/we do fun activities		
Yes/it's great fun and we learn a lot of things		
		40 C. Corcoll

Table 6. Sample of treatment group's post-test answer to 'Did anything surprise you this term? What?'

	Yes	No	What
1.	X		English spelling is weird
2.	X		We work while we play
3.	X		We play while we learn and we also spoke in three languages: Catalan, Spanish and English
4.	X		Be recorded
5.	X		That English is widely spoken, Cristina sometimes speaks in Spanish and Catalan
6.	X		The date in English has a comma
7.	X		The worksheets where we write whether we like the activity
8.	X		Cristina speaks Catalan
9.	X		The plays and the date because we don't say marc, [in Catalan], we say March
10.	X		Not much but one thing like for example that English spelling is weird
11.	X		Cristina is such a good teacher and we learn a lot playing games

- (2) The use of the pedagogically based CS will improve English vocabulary acquisition and production;
- (3) The use of the pedagogically based CS will increase students' motivation for learning;
- (4) The use of the pedagogically based CS will increase students' self-esteem;
- (5) The use of the pedagogically based CS will improve classroom atmosphere;

Regarding hypotheses 1 and 2, the results do not corroborate them, although it is important to say that even though the children's oral comprehension and vocabulary acquisition and production did not improve more in the treatment group than in the control groups, it did not get worse either. The use of the children's mother tongues in the English classroom did not seem to have a negative effect on their language acquisition. Although this needs to be researched further, a possible explanation could be related to the age of the students and to their level of proficiency, as well as to the fact that a longer exposure to plurilingual activities may be needed before more positive results begin to show. As well as the pedagogically based CS,

contextual clues such as non-verbal communication, visual support and so on, were effectively used by the teacher to create an immersion-like learning space. Probably

Table 7. Control groups post-test answer to 'Did anything surprise you this term? What?'

Control group 1 Yes. To be recorded and for another teacher to come. Yes. To be recorded.

Yes. Sometimes we have misbehaved and they crossed out a number.^a

Control group 2 Yes. Cristina is pregnant.

No.

Yes. The parts of the face.

Control group 3 Yes. We do more things.

No.

Yes. Rudolph, dictations.

^aThe child is referring to a management strategy used by the teacher.

these students, due to their still basic proficiency level, still benefited mostly from these strategies. This would explain why they learnt as much as the children in the control groups. This does not mean, however, that the use of the pedagogically based CS did not serve any purpose: even if it did not seem to bring about positive cognitive results related to linguistic acquisition per se, other types of benefits may be attributed to it, as described next.

Specifically, the qualitative analysis of activity surveys and group interviews (together with observations collected by the teacher during the lessons) shows that there are positive outcomes that were not hypothesised related to the development of language awareness. It could be justified that this improvement in language awareness might lead to language improvement both the language taught and the children's mother tongues given the treatment was followed for a longer time period.

Regarding hypotheses 3, 4 and 5, they have been corroborated by the research, specifically as observed in the motivation post-tests and, more clearly, in the transcription of group interviews. When answering questions or when talking about the activities done in class, the comments made by students were mostly positive: they enjoyed the activities and they felt that they had learnt from them. Observation of class dynamics indicates that students' participation was also positive.

Conclusion

When looking at the results that have been described above, a few points seem worth mentioning:

- (1) In the first place, the quality and depth of metalinguistic discussion (and, thus, of language awareness development) that the children are able to engage in depends greatly on the effectiveness of the activities that they carry out. This highlights how important it is that the activity design and planning is done by the language teacher who knows the children and their linguistic background.
- (2) In the second place, the activities of a plurilingual nature are likely to be collaborative. This might be considered either a consequence or an effect, but it is in any case positive for the learning process and the classroom atmosphere. It also promotes mediation between languages and knowledge, which is, in its turn, another ability that plurilingual speakers should develop.
- (3) In the third place, even if they lack grammatical knowledge, children are able to identify structures or language uses that are not correct. In a sense, they can feel that something is wrong when, for instance, an article is missing in a Spanish noun phrase or the word order is not appropriate in an English noun phrase. This feeling can only be effectively developed in language contexts that are based on immersion, communicative teaching and simultaneous use

of different languages that is informed, rather than spontaneous, and that plays a specific role that the teacher can promote, as the pedagogically based CS intends.

- (4) Finally, it seems that bringing more languages to the classroom as part of the teaching and learning activities in an informed way:

Promotes thinking and talking about languages and their characteristics (language awareness and metalinguistic skills);

Enhances the relationship between work and play (as working with three languages at the same time is more cognitively demanding but also more motivating for children); and

Does not change the role of English as the language that is being taught.

The research carried out with the children and described here provides some evidence that by bringing the children's known languages through a particular linguistic feature into the additional language classroom, the teacher can help them develop the ability to think about languages and value them differently. This is probably the greatest benefit that has been obtained, as the languages seem to gain a clearer status in the children's minds than they had when they were presented separately, and transfer of knowledge and abilities is thus promoted. Thinking of and valuing languages from a plurilingual perspective helps them as language learners and, ultimately, as learners, as it helps them develop their language awareness and their ability to compare and analyse abstract realities. It also helps them respect and value other languages and other cultures as they feel they get to know them better, as well as their own. The foreign language becomes one more language in the children's minds; a language that can be used for the same purposes and in the same ways as their own and, ultimately, a language that can also help them improve theirs. The language classroom becomes a place where everyone feels more at ease as children's participation increases and where all children – depending on the language they speak at home – find moments where they feel safe and able to answer and speak for themselves. It also becomes a plurilingual setting where mediation, collaboration and personal engagement are promoted. In this sense, the language classroom becomes a more comfortable and motivating place for all of them, which is probably one of the most important ingredients for successful learning.

Notes

1. The research project the article is based on is part of ongoing research carried out by the Research Group on Interlinguistic and Intercultural Competences in Teaching and Learning Languages (CILCEAL) in the Faculty of Psychology, Education and Sports Science Blanquerna, Ramon Llull University and was partially presented at a Conference held at the University of Oxford (27-28 March, 2009) entitled 'First and second languages: exploring the relationship in pedagogy-related contexts'.
2. In the Catalan (and Spanish) educational context Primary Education starts at six and ends at 12.
3. The activities and results described in this article relate to the first topic, food and drinks. 4. Word order is one of the areas that has been identified as being more sensitive to transfer in early ages: 'Young children learning a second language can draw on specific features of their first language to achieve particular purposes. One feature that children sometimes carry into the L2 is the dominant word order of their L1' (Nicholas & Lightbown, 2008, p. 40).
5. A further difficulty has to do with the fact that, in Catalan, as in English, there is also only one word to refer to these two concepts: *peix*.
6. Other research instruments that were used were a teacher's diary, observation in class, videorecording in class and the revision of tasks produced by children.
7. The answers given by the children – whether in written documents or in the interviews – were always in Catalan (and, when presented here in Catalan, children's mistakes have been kept) and have been translated into English by the researcher. A selection of comments is also included here.
8. Many studies have shown the potential link between bilingualism and phonological and

word awareness skills the fact that these skills are implicated in early literacy means that the role that bilingualism plays in enhancing literacy development in early childhood needs to be taken into account (Bee Chin & Wigglesworth, 2007).

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