The Impact of Linguistic Diversity on the Delivery of Modern Foreign Languages at Third Level

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A ‘Super-diverse’ student body: Present but unacknowledged in the classroom generally

**linguistic - cultural - life experiences**

- 1.5 generation: 17%
- International students: 10%
- Irish' Students: 63%
The super-diverse language classroom

- English: 68%
- Japanese: 1%
- French: 3%
- Hungarian: 4%
- Russian: 1%
- German: 3%
- Croatian: 1%
- Lithuanian: 4%
- Cantonese: 1%
- Mandarin: 1%
- Tagalog: 1%
- Italian: 1%
- Polish: 1%
- Arabic: 1%

Other languages (each 1%): Ukranian, Polish, Ukrainian, Polish, Arabic, Armenian, Bengali, Chinese, Danish, Dutch, English (UK), French, German, Greek, Hindi, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latin, Lithuanian, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Tamil, Thai, Turkish, Urdu, Welsh, Xhosa.
The “pluralist dilemma” generally

- Cultural & Linguistic Pluralism
  - MULTICULTURALISM
    - ‘true’ internationalisation of higher education

- Social Cohesion & Homogenisation
  - Globalised higher education
The pluralist dilemma in foreign language teaching: Current approach optimal?

Diversity & Difference
- Explicit acknowledgment of diverse L1s in cohort

Cohesion & Homogenity
- Treat cohort as though language of instruction is common L1
“It is only from an informed research base, which in turn directly influences language educational policy development, that further progress can be made on realigning the predilection to monolingualism that still so dominates public policy on language education – particularly but not exclusively when the language in question is the new global juggernaut of English” (May, 2014: 234).

Why are facts so useless in this discussion? (Fischer, 1992)
Evidence from applied linguistics

- The best means of acquiring a foreign language is via the L1 (Language rights).
- Foreign language learning is most effective when it draws upon the entire linguistic repertoire of an individual.
- Proficiency levels in the L1, L2 (including mother tongue and medium of instruction) impact the ease of acquisition of the additional foreign language.
- However, ‘monolingual mindset’ or ‘deficit perspective on diversity’ prevalent in classrooms.
Approaches to harnessing linguistic diversity in the language classroom: PLURILINGUAL PEDAGOGIES [1]

- **RAISE AWARENESS** - Create Class Language Profile using the Common European Framework of Reference for languages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CEFR Level</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>B1</th>
<th>B2</th>
<th>C1</th>
<th>C2</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Irish</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Approaches to harnessing linguistic diversity in the language classroom: PLURILINGUAL PEDAGOGIES [2]

- **EXPLICIT COMPARISON** of key grammatical concepts: cases/tenses/structures/register...
  - 10 minute presentation by lecturer
  - Students divided into small groups with as many common languages as feasible
  - **Student-led comparison** of concept in target language and other languages in their repertoire (groups of 3-4)
  - Discussion in plenary
Student feedback

Awareness Raising Activities: Language Profile

- + 90%
  - Pragmatic: mutual help
  - Social: increased group cohesion
  - Affective: motivating to see what others can achieve

- - 8%
  - Distracting
  - Time wasting
Student Feedback

Plurlingual activities

+ 70%
  - Aids understanding
  - Gives new perspective

- 20%
  - Confusing – Lost
  - Time-wasting
Enhancing the delivery of foreign languages in super-diverse environments
FURTHER RESEARCH NEEDED

- ...into plurlingual approaches to the education of bi/multilingual learners
  - Include *longitudinal* elements
  - Test for association with *proficiency* levels
  - Use different *language pairs*
  - Variety of *fora* [online, face-to-face]

...into pluricultural approaches
- Explore impact of *cultural* diversity including assumption of knowledge of local culture
- Consider learner preferences, diverse learning styles, learner expectations, ‘cultural baggage’
Enhancing the delivery of foreign languages in super-diverse environments: POLICY REFORM

- **TRAINING & QUALIFICATIONS**

  Incorporate *plurilingual pedagogies* into *Continuous Professional Development* for language lecturers
  - provided by language institutes
  - Provided by internal University units (TEU)

  Consider mandatory *qualifications for university language lecturers* incorporating the findings of ongoing SOTL in plurilingual pedagogies

- **HE FUNDING**

  Facilitate *plurilingual pedagogies* at third level – *lecturer : student ratios*
A ‘Super-diverse’ student body: A broader need for discipline-specific, research-informed CPD and policy making

**Linguistic and Cultural Diversity**

- 1.5 generation
- International students
- Irish' Students
Selected References: