Language Awareness and the Development of Learners’ Plurilingual Competence

Ana Luísa Oliveira and Maria Helena Ançã

Introduction

Plurilingualism is the “new linguistic world order/dispensation” (Aronin and Singleton, 2008), being at the core of the research and intervention agenda in several social science fields, including education. In fact, political, social and economic changes occurring in the world, characterized for example by worldwide mobility and globalization, have made multilingualism – the multilingual nature of a given society – a ubiquitous reality, and plurilingualism – an individual’s ability to use several languages (Council of Europe (CE), 2001) – a crucial prerequisite for addressing global society’s present-day challenges. Hence, both for those who live in particularly diverse societies and/or whose personal experiences have led them to naturally engage in and acknowledge linguistic and culturally diverse phenomena, or for those who, as a consequence of living in less diverse settings and being less exposed to such phenomena, have only recently started to notice multilingualism as an undeniable feature of today’s society, the enhancement of plurilingualism is key to fulfilling the individual’s everyday needs over his or her lifetime in this complex, dynamic and multifaceted world.

This awareness corresponds to a major paradigm shift in education. Being based not only, but especially, on the results of sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic research, this shift has led researchers and teachers to claim that only a holistic conception of the individual’s linguistic and communicative competence – as a multiple, dynamic, integrated, contextualized and individualized set of competences – can provide an adequate response to current education challenges. The development of such competence deeply affects the teaching and learning processes, requiring the development and implementation of didactic approaches that may respond to each student’s needs and to the aims put forward by language learning policies. Fostering such a complex competence implies heightened awareness and control over one’s repertoires, which may be achieved naturally by individuals, or not. Thus, one of the aims of formal language education must be the development of the set of attitudes, knowledge in action and skills that plurilingual competence (PC) entails, by making students engage in language awareness (LA) work in the classroom.
In this chapter, after interrelating the concepts of PC and LA, we present an overview of research carried out in this area. We address the following issues: PC dimensions tackled by researchers; the corresponding domains of LA addressed; the teaching approaches used. This analysis allows us to identify and discuss crucial areas of intervention, regarding the development of learners’ PC and LA.

**Plurilingualism and Plurilingual Competence: From an Acknowledged Reality to an Established Didactic Goal**

PC’s emergence and its establishment/development as an educational goal derives not only from empirical and theoretical research conducted in sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics, but also from the design of language policies in Europe. Such policies are aimed at keeping up with the demands of globalization.

Providing evidence that the actual interactional practices of bi/plurilingual subjects account for much more complex (intra and inter-individual) linguistic possibilities than those traditionally described by early theories of language acquisition development and use, results from research have challenged uncritical and conventionally accepted theories such as a ‘monolingual view of bilingualism’, and proposed new viewpoints regarding the phenomenon of bi/plurilingualism (Grosjean, 2008; Ortega, 2014). Instead of considering that a bi/plurilingual person corresponds to the sum of two or plus ‘perfect’ monolingual native speakers, researchers have claimed a more complex and holistic view of an individual’s bi/plurilingual repertoire, considering it as composed of two or more languages which interact, are combined and are activated in various ways, with different levels of proficiency, according to the contexts of use and to their linguistic and communicative needs (Cook, 1992).

Underlying this paradigmatic shift are, amongst others, the following convictions:

1 **Plurilingualism must be viewed from a holistic and integrated perspective, since neurolinguistic and psycholinguistic findings suggest interaction of various brain areas during cognitive activities, at least momentarily** (Jeoffrion, Marcouyeux, Starkey-Perret, Narcy-Combes and Birkan, 2014).

2 **Plurilingualism differs substantially from monolingualism, as the acquisition of additional languages “triggers qualitative changes in the psycholinguistic organization in the brain, which in turn creates new linguistic competence”** (Jeoffrion et al., 2014: 10). A distinctive asset of plurilingual speakers is indeed the enhancement of the subjects’ metalinguistic awareness, the so-called *M(ultilingualism)-factor* (Jessner, 2006, and see also her chapter in this volume).

3 **Plurilingual speakers possess an uneven command of the languages of their repertoires, resulting from the different needs and uses they make of the different languages in everyday life** (Coste, Moore and Zarate, 2009/1997).

4 **Cognitive processes such as code-mixing or code-switching, traditionally viewed as negative aspects in language acquisition, appear not only as unavoidable processes during plurilingual development but also as intrinsic characteristics of plurilingual competent speakers** (Cenoz, Hufeisen and Jessner, 2001).

5 **The development of a plurilingual system is non-linear, reversible, interdependent and complex, including both acquisition and attrition processes throughout the lifespan** (Jessner, 2006).
6 Plurilingual speakers’ linguistic system is adaptive and dynamic, thus it can change according to the perceived communicative needs of individuals, and those language choices can be determined psychologically or socially (Jessner, 2006).

With these principles in mind, several researchers have advocated the establishment of new educational goals and the development of adequate teaching and learning models, which could more efficiently account for individuals’ “translanguaging” (García, 2009) practices and respond to their communicative needs.

Linked to and sustained by this theoretical and empirical research-based paradigmatic shift, plurilinguism emerged in 2001 as a core concept of European language policies, providing the necessary political and theoretical framework, teaching and learning goals and context-based didactic orientations for the fulfilment of European societies and of speakers’ individual and social linguistic-communicative needs and aspirations through the lifespan. The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* defines Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence (PC) 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. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw.

*CE, 2001: 168*

A plurilingual competent speaker possesses a unique, complex, dynamic, composite and uneven competence which enables him/her “to use different languages for different purposes with different levels of command” (Beacco, 2005). Individuals should then build up an integrated communicative competence, based on the merging of different languages and cultures into a more complete linguistic repertoire that will be differently updated and activated according to changing/specific circumstances and needs.

From a practical viewpoint, PC involves the complex mobilization and management of different kinds of dispositions (wills, motivations), of various (linguistic-communicative and learning) repertoires, as well as of discursive and interactional processes: i.e. a sum of multiple, multidimensional, differentiated, uneven and interactive resources (Andrade, Araújo e Sá, Bartolomeu et al., 2003; CE, 2001), which interrelate with each other differently depending on various factors (see Figure 15.1).

The *socio-affective dimension* relates to one’s predispositions regarding languages/cultures and the communication with the Other. It encompasses wills, dispositions, motivations (instrumental, integrative or academic oriented), qualities and representations towards languages/cultures/people and awareness of communicative obstacles (e.g. fear, intolerance, stereotypes and inflexibility).

The *management of linguistic and communicative repertoires dimension*: i.e. a subject’s ability to manage and update his/her linguistic and communicative biography (different languages acquiring different functions, status and roles) in new interaction/learning situations. It includes the use of strategies to understand and be understood, comprising a commitment in relation to the successful accomplishment of the communication process.
The management of learning repertoires dimension relates to the language acquisition and learning processes the subject is able to activate in language contact situations. It includes procedural and meta-procedural processes and encompasses strategies as resorting to knowledge of the world, inducing rules, observing and reflecting upon languages as systems and upon plurilingual interaction.

Finally, the management of interaction dimension refers to the use of interactive processes/strategies (interpretation, translation and code-switching) characteristic of language contact situations that allow the interlocutors to successfully accomplish plurilingual exchanges.

The development of such a complex, context-situated, integrated, multilingual communicative competence (Coste, Moore and Zarate, 1997/2009) implies a degree of control over one's repertoire(s) which may, or may not, be achieved intuitively, depending, among other factors, on the individual's characteristics and on the opportunities he/she is given to develop his/her own self-knowledge about the constitutive structures of his/her (plurilingual) identity (Oliveira and Ançã, 2009, 2011). From a didactic viewpoint, this implies that, irrespective of students’ linguistic-communicative profiles, personal experiences and/or their more or less self-ascribed plurilingual identities, all students should be led to consider explicitly the type of relationship that they establish with the different languages of their repertoire, the use they make of each language in relation to different communicative purposes, the way the learning/acquisition process of languages occurs, and the factors that underlie the use and learning/acquisition processes of languages, among other aspects (Svalberg, 2007). Students should be made aware not only of what they know but also of how they know it (van Lier, 1998: 135) and, moreover, what they have at their disposal in order to develop their linguistic-communicative and learning competences.

LA arises, then, as a crucial element in language teaching and learning, given its well-acknowledged role in making students engage with language at different levels
Language Awareness and the Development of Plurilingual Competence

Since its emergence in the early 1980s, as a “new ‘bridging’ element in the UK school curriculum” between the mother tongue and foreign languages, the aims and scope of LA have evolved remarkably into a much more complex and wide-reaching concept. Indeed, Hawkins’ (1981, 1984, 1999) concerns about improving literacy in UK schools and minimizing intolerance and exclusion in society by implementing programmes of study about language soon gave rise to an expansion of the field, through the worldwide development of theoretical and research-oriented studies, as well as didactic approaches aiming at the development of “a person’s sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life” (Donmall, 1985: 7). Following on from the proliferation of LA work, James and Garrett (1992), in an attempt to delimit the concept’s scope, defined it as comprising five dimensions: affective, social, ‘power’, cognitive and performance.

The affective domain, described as aiming at “forming attitudes, awakening and developing attention, sensitivity, curiosity, interest and aesthetic response” (Donmall, 1985: 7) towards languages, concerns individuals’ beliefs and images about languages as well as their willingness to engage (or not) in communicative and interactive situations with other people. As several studies demonstrated, considering and working on students’ dispositions and motivations and representations of languages/cultures is crucial, since they may, for example, influence a) students’ choice regarding the acquisition/learning of languages, b) students’ linguistic learning effectiveness, c) the procedures activated during language learning as well as students’ commitment to the tasks proposed, and d) students’ profile and performance in intercultural communication situations by, for example, hindering or fostering their participation in these types of encounters (Oliveira and Ançã, 2011).

The social domain is related to the “problems of ethnic diversity and inter-group relations” (James and Garrett, 1992: 13) deriving from global migration phenomena, and emphasizes the role of LA at the service of global harmony by raising awareness of the origins and characteristics of students’ own language(s), of languages’ varieties, and the place they occupy on the world map. The power domain deals with the notion of language as an instrument of manipulation and aims at drawing students’ attention to social power relationships and to the concealed meanings in discourse. Students are expected to become sensitive to the multiple purposes of language and to gain control over their language(s) for both communicative and achievement purposes, by reflecting upon how language attitudes and values are formed socially and politically, and by critically analysing language ideologies, such as those that ascribe different roles/status to languages in today’s global society (Oliveira and Ançã, 2011). Both the social and the power domains of LA are to be achieved by developing language proficiency and enhancing linguistic vigilance. In multilingual contexts, students’ empowerment will thus comprise the development of knowledge and positive attitudes about different languages and cultures, as well as the development and successful activation of students’ linguistic repertoires in different (politically and culturally marked) communicative situations.
The **cognitive domain** refers to the positive effects of stimulating individuals’ ability to analytically reflect upon different features of language, and it aims at improving the intellectual functioning of students by developing their awareness of “pattern, contrast, system, categories, rules of language in use and the ability to reflect upon language” (Donmall, 1985: 7). From a plurilingual perspective, this implies that students are led not only to analyse the different features of languages as independent systems, but also to focus their attention on the similarities and differences between languages in their repertoires (or others they are aware of) that can enhance (or hinder) transfer in communicative and learning situations.

Finally, the **performance domain** aims at improving the efficiency and proficiency of an individual’s language use, by developing his/her analytical ability. Traditionally described as the most “contentious” domain (James and Garrett, 1992), it is also the one at the core of the work conducted in LA. Indeed:

Though it is recognized that some learners are likely to benefit more than others from any given approach (…), the point of departure for LA practitioners is that developing a better understanding of the language and of learning/teaching processes will generally enhance language learning/teaching and use.

*Svalberg, 2007: 290*

This domain relates, thus, to language in use, choice, change and management, communication strategies (e.g. code-switching) and the ability to talk about language using a more or less formal metalanguage (metalinguistic competence).

Similarly to PC’s dimensions, LA’s five domains are not “mutually exclusive, operating in isolation from one another” (James and Garrett, 1992: 20). Indeed, considering that PC’s development implies the development of a set of attitudes, knowledge in action and skills that enable individuals to cope with the challenges of our multilingual global society by resorting to their situated and integrated deployment of semiotic resources (Canagarajah, 2014), only a holistic approach to LA that goes beyond the purely linguistic domain (reflection about the functional rules of language(s)) and encompasses the five interrelated domains mentioned may allow students to effectively “engage with language” at different levels (Svalberg, 2009) and become successful language learners and users.

Given this chapter’s main focus, a point should be made with regard to the so-called *M(ultilingualism)-factor* referred to in the previous section and which is defined as metalinguistic awareness itself. As has been acknowledged, it is difficult to decide whether the M-effect is a precondition or a result of plurilingualism. While several researchers have provided evidence of an enhanced metalinguistic awareness in plurilingual subjects, with positive effects in their divergent and creative thinking, pragmatic competence, communicative sensitivity, translation skills, and monitor abilities (Canagarajah, 2014; Jessner, 2006), others strive to present it as an adequate methodology for the development of students’ PC (Svalberg, 2007).

We argue here that LA must be considered from two complementary perspectives: as an intrinsic nature of plurilingual individuals and as a didactic methodology at teachers’ disposal to make students engage with language. Rephrasing Hawkins’ (1999) interrogation with a slightly different rationale, the question here is: how can we [language teachers] help all learners, and not just those who have already achieved an enhanced metalinguistic awareness due to their plurilingual experiences/profiles, to
gain a similar linguistic preparation that enables them to become effective plurilingual competent speakers and learners?

Considering that contact with, comparison between, and reflection about languages strengthens LA and fosters language learning abilities, researchers and practitioners within the field of Didactics of Plurilingualism have started to argue for the implementation of more holistic and integrated language teaching and learning approaches, involving different languages and cross-linguistic strategies (Cenoz and Gorter, 2011; Jessner, 2006). By promoting the development of students’ LA, such strategies may enhance the development of the plural, complex and composite plurilingual and pluricultur al competence previously presented.

Possible Interconnections between the Development of Learner’s Plurilingual Competence and Language Awareness: An Overview

Although research on this issue is published internationally in a range of journals and languages, our discussion focuses on peer-reviewed articles (in the English language), concerning primary empirical research conducted in language education contexts and published in four selected databases (Language Awareness Journal, Taylor and Francis Group, Scopus and B-ON) since the emergence of the CEFR (2001). Our sources are set out in Table 15.1.

A comprehensive analysis of our corpus allows us to identify some general features of the research conducted in this field over the past 15 years:

1 The main target public of the studies are Basic Education students from the first years. Indeed, many of these papers refer to awakening to languages, intercomprehension and bilingual education programmes aiming at raising students’ awareness and at developing students’ positive attitudes towards linguistic and cultural diversity. Such programmes have been traditionally developed in the first years of the school system, probably in an attempt to fulfil Hawkins’ (1999) dream – to nourish the roots for the development of a sustainable linguistic competence in individuals – probably supported by the general conviction that in early Basic Education, in which one generalist teacher normally teaches children, it is easier to implement these interdisciplinary approaches.

Table 15.1. Journals sample with numbers of articles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual Research Journal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of Bilingual Education &amp; Bilingualism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of Bilingualism</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of Multilingualism</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and Education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and Intercultural Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Awareness</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigo International Journal of Applied Linguistics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notwithstanding this, there is only a very small sample of studies with kindergarten pupils. This may, however, not correspond to the non-existence of studies, but to some type of “academic invisibility” (the difficulty of practitioners to access indexed publications).

An evolution of the publications in terms of focus and matureness of analysis. Articles written in the early years of the 21st century focus more explicitly on the transference of knowledge of L1 to L2/FL and report pilot-projects regarding the implementation of linguistic/cultural diversity-raising awareness approaches. Then, as we move forward in time, not only do the aims of developing learners’ PC and its relationships with LA become more evident and theoretically grounded, but also a proliferation of empirical didactic approaches trying to accomplish the most recent trends in language education and verify their applicability/assets can be attested.

We will try now to answer the following questions:

1. Which PC dimensions have been tackled by researchers/practitioners?
2. What dimensions of LA do they relate to?
3. Which teaching approaches/practices are used (to encourage learners’ LA within the scope of the development of their PC)?

Which PC Dimensions Have Been Tackled by Researchers/Practitioners?

First, we should stress that the PC dimensions addressed here cannot be considered in isolation from each other, since they are intrinsically interrelated, being contextually updated and redefined through lifetime, according to various factors. This artificial separation is only admissible for the purpose of trying to provide an overview of research trends in this area.

The categorization of studies into the predominant dimension(s) resulted from the consideration by the two co-authors of the dimension(s) that were explicitly addressed in each study. This does not mean that other dimensions were not dealt with in any way, but they were not the main research focus.

Figure 15.2 reveals a prevalence of the management of linguistic and communicative repertoires dimension, either as the single dimension addressed, or combined with

![Figure 15.2. Numbers of articles addressing each of the PC dimensions.](image-url)
other PC dimensions, with target publics ranging from pre-school pupils to university students.

Studies focusing more specifically on this dimension have mainly addressed the following issues:

1 *Students’ management of their repertoires in the accomplishment of specific oral and written tasks in additional languages.* Armengol and Cots (2009) analyse multilingual university students’ level of awareness in the course of writing a short essay in L2 and L3 and explore the relationship between the level of awareness demonstrated and the final written products. Wrembel (2015) explores the metaphorological awareness evinced by German native speakers with multilingual competences, by analysing, among other aspects, their self-awareness of problems in L3 pronunciation and the level of metacognitive control and comments on the pronunciation learning process.

2 *Students’ plurilingual profiles (repertoires/identities, competences and practices).* Through the development of immigrant students’ life narratives, Oliveira and Ançã (2009) account for students’ perception of their plurilingual identities and competences by reconstructing the processes intervening in their development and analysing how students perceive the contribution of their plurilingual repertoires in the process of learning Portuguese. Moore (2010) highlights “the complexity of linguistic repertoires, language choices and patterns of literacy development” of young Chinese children in French immersion, in the acquisition of three writing systems. Melo-Pfeifer (2015) analyses drawings of migrant background children attending Portuguese heritage Language classes in Germany, in order to acknowledge their self-perception as multilingual selves.

3 *Bilinguals’ advantages in the development of learners’ PC.* Safont-Jordà’s research (2003) on the effect of bilingualism in L3 learners’ pragmatic production and metapragmatic awareness confirms the advantage of bilinguals over monolinguals in justifying their evaluation of the appropriateness of certain request strategies, as well as on their use of request realizations. Dillon (2009), trying to compare children being educated in an immersion programme (through the medium of L2) to those being educated primarily through the medium of their L1, provides evidence that more balanced bilinguals display a higher level of general proficiency and metalinguistic awareness than less balanced bilinguals. Rauch, Naumann and Jude (2012) conclude that full literacy (in L1 and L2) is needed for bilingualism to be positively associated with L3 reading proficiency, and that positive effects of full biliteracy on L3 reading proficiency are mediated through metalinguistic awareness.

The second most tackled dimension is the socio-affective, which hardly appears solely (it emerges frequently connected to one of the other three dimensions, as well as to two or even the three dimensions altogether). Two main concerns regarding this dimension emerge:

1 *The analysis of students’ representations and dispositions about (the learning/acquisition of) languages.* Bono and Stratilaki (2009), for example, stress the need to be aware of and work on students’ naive representations about languages and the language learning process, since these representations may be counterproductive for learners’ ability and disposition to draw upon PC. Henry (2014) reflects upon the
potentially negative impact that cross-referencing with the L2 (English) can have on L3 (German or Spanish) learning motivation.

2 Raising cultural and linguistic awareness among school children and their teachers (and parents). Studies by Young and Helot (2003) and Bernaus, Furlong, Jonckheere and Kervran (2012) both report the (positive) results of intervention projects purposefully conceived to develop positive attitudes towards languages and cultures. Corcoll (2013) accounts for the positive effects of an additional language on 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 used in the classroom in an informed way.

The management of learning repertoires dimension is the second less represented dimension, appearing related to both the socio-affective and management of learning repertoires dimensions. Arising usually (but not exclusively) in studies concerning the presentation of didactic approaches, this dimension has stressed two major perspectives:

1 The analysis of students’ learning repertoires and of the strategies used (or perceived as useful) when learning an additional language. Oliveira and Ançã (2009), for example, analyse immigrant students’ previous knowledge and learning strategies in the process of learning a Shelter Language. Chostelidou, Griva, Ioannidis and Panitisidou (2012) report vocational education and training students’ awareness in employing cognitive, memory and metacognitive strategies in FL1 and FL2, as well as their preferences for aspects of FL1 and FL2 learning.

2 The implementation of methodologies (and instruments) aiming at fostering learners’ autonomy and strategic/learning competences. Both Little (2012) and Downing (2012) highlight the European Language Portfolio as a tool capable of making positive impacts on the learning of additional languages, by motivating students to identify their own learning targets and assess their own progress, and by fostering the emergence and development of learning and intercomprehension strategies. Bernaus et al. (2012) highlight that ConBaT+ programme didactic units, besides challenging pupils to use previously known learning strategies to solve problems, also lead them to discover new ones. De Zarobe and Coyle (2015) address the need to develop new pedagogic approaches that promote learner independence in multilingual learning contexts, by evidencing the effectiveness of making teachers and learners act as co-researchers: i.e. by leading them to engage in reflexive processes about their own (teaching and learning) practices.

The least-focused dimension, the management of interaction, always appears related to one, two or three PC dimensions. Papers addressing this dimension usually present the following trends:

1 The analysis of students’ use of interactive processes in language contact situations. Araújo e Sá and Melo (2007), for example, referring to the Intercomprehension project Galanet, which comprised multilingual learning situations between Romance languages speakers, report that participants successfully resorted to different communicative problem-solving strategies, by mobilizing their linguistic and communicative repertoires, interaction skills and affective dispositions, for the purpose of coming to a mutual understanding.
2 The implementation of didactic strategies aiming at fostering students’ interactional abilities. Alves and Mendes (2006) report an Intercomprehension project in which some of the activities developed aimed specifically at raising students’ awareness of the strategies used by speakers when in actual situations of plurilingual communication. Henery (2015) highlights the qualitative transformation of two students’ metapragmatic awareness following a semester abroad in France, arguing that the student who had access to a(n expert-mediation) concept-based pragmatics instruction programme outperformed the one who followed a standard semester programme.

Besides the overrepresentation of the management of the linguistic and communicative repertoires dimension (and the socio-affective dimension, to some extent) which the abovementioned analysis stresses, our corpus also illustrates the multiple correlations between PC’s constitutive elements, which ultimately reinforce the complex nature of PC itself. This is particularly evident in papers presenting teaching and learning approaches and analysing/assessing their contribution towards PC and LA development. Focusing usually on two or more dimensions, these studies illustrate the difficulty (impossibility?) of practitioners to work with PC in isolated terms.

What Domains of LA do the PC Dimensions Relate to?

As can be seen in Figure 15.3, the most represented LA domain is the cognitive domain, followed at some distance by the affective domain, and then by the social and performance domains. The power domain was only addressed in one study.

Looking at LA’s domains as a whole, there seems to be a lack of investment in the development and analysis of students’ LA in relation to social and power issues, which may relate to the under-represented socio-affective and performance dimensions of the PC previously mentioned. Analysing/working on individuals’ motivations, attitudes and predispositions, namely for the sake of enhancing students’ communicative competences in intercultural encounters (where interpersonal and power relationships are

![Figure 15.3. Numbers of articles addressing each of the LA domains.](image-url)
discursively constructed and negotiated), implies addressing the driving forces exerted by political, social, and historical factors in relation to languages and language users, as they may determine not only people’s viewpoints and the use they make of their linguistic repertoires, but also their language acquisition choices, the effort put into learning a new language and their willingness to participate in intercultural encounters (Oliveira and Ançã, 2009).

Likewise, the smaller number of references concerning the performance domain may also be linked to the absence of research focused on the interactional dimension of the PC, which, in turn, echoes James and Garrett’s (1992) viewpoint on the lack of studies evincing the correlation between one’s linguistic knowledge and performance. Indeed, our corpus, focused on the plurilingual repertoires management, also fails to provide further information about this ‘contentious’ domain.

The overrepresentation of the cognitive domain unveils three possible explanations. The first is the fact that, given its cognitive and metacognitive nature, it is intrinsically related to the development of learners’ linguistic and learning repertoires, which is the main dimension addressed in our corpus. The second possibility relates to the formal learning contexts in which the empirical research was conducted and the fact that, in a significant number of these studies, the main focus is the analysis of the development of competences in one specific language (L2, L3…) within the scope of PC and LA. The third possible explanation relates to traditional language education goals, which are too focused on the development of students’ grammar knowledge (in this case in different languages).

When criss-crossing the domains of LA with the dimensions of PC, strong correlations arise between (a) the cognitive domain of LA and both the management of linguistic and communicative repertoires and the management of learning repertoires dimensions of PC, and (b) the affective domain of LA and the socio-affective dimension of PC. Several examples of the cognitive and metacognitive aspects of LA addressed by researchers and practitioners within the scope of the development of PC can be referred to. One of the most recurrent aspects within this scope is the importance of resorting to prior language knowledge and learning strategies in the development of competences in a new language. Fielding (2015), for instance, presents evidence on how plurilingual children inevitably drew on their home language(s) as a resource in school contexts where other languages were used, and on how they were able to develop learning strategies built on their plurilingual experiences.

Related to this is the importance of students reflecting upon people’s repertoires and competences as well as contexts of use of languages. As both Oliveira and Ançã (2009) and Moore (2010) stress, making students aware of their (or others’) migration/learning/linguistic experiences, plurilingual practices, and the contexts of language usage is an important step towards the development of their PC, as they become aware not only of the plurilingual asset their repertoires entail but also of the opportunities they have at their disposal to enhance multilingual development.

Another common perspective is the importance of comparing languages and reflecting upon perceived and objective linguistic distances between languages, as well as linguistic forms and functions. Lourenço and Andrade (2014), for example, account for the benefits of kindergarten children “observing, analysing and comparing words, sounds and graphemes; discovering the alphabetic principle; and applying their knowledge to new situations, in a clear progressive path” (p. 315), in order to develop phonological competence and gain a greater awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity. In
several studies, such as the one by Araújo e Sá and Melo (2007), exolingual communicative situations and “translanguaging” practices emerge as crucial “resources” for raising individuals’ awareness about languages and the way they work together.

The importance of metacognitive knowledge, (self-)regulation, and assessment in the development of PC is also stressed by some researchers. Wrembel (2015), analysing the introspective comments of multilingual learners of L3 Polish, concludes that, being at the interaction of metalinguistic awareness and cross-linguistic awareness, metaphor-logical awareness presents itself as an essential component of multilingual competence. Little (2012) and Downing (2012) argue for the importance of promoting reflective self-assessment, by the means of the European Language Portfolio, to foster the “emergence and support of strategies used in learning, as well as the specific necessary strategies in intercomprehension processes” (Downing, 2012: 65).

The focus on pedagogically based code-switching in language classrooms as an LA-raising strategy and a learning strategy in multilingual education contexts is highlighted by Maillat and Serra (2009), who present code-switching as a learner-oriented facilitating approach which, by relying on the conversational routines of bi/multilingual communication settings, contributes to the enhancement of students’ metalinguistic ability and to the development of “new specifically multilingual conceptual strategies to acquire and use new concepts in the subject-matters taught in L2” (p. 196).

The metalinguistic asset of bi/plurilingual speakers is highlighted in the studies of Dillon (2009) and Rauch et al. (2012), in which balanced bilinguals are presented as displaying higher general proficiency levels of metalinguistic awareness, and as evincing higher levels of cross-linguistic transfer. Likewise, Jessner (2005) presents metalanguage as evidence of the multilingual speakers’ greater ability to reflect upon language(s).

As to the correlation between the affective domain of LA and the socio-affective dimension of the PC, the main focuses of research have been:

1. The development of positive attitudes and curiosity towards languages and cultures, by making students engage with and raise awareness about linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as analysing and assessing their plurilingual profiles. Young and Helot (2003) report a strong interrelationship between students’ ability to reflect upon language and the development of multilingual identities, the promotion of tolerance and the widening of pupils’ horizons. Araújo e Sá and Melo (2007) also acknowledge Galanet Intercomprehension project’s ability to foster university students’ “linguistic and cultural broadmindedness and acceptance (...) an open attitude towards relationships between languages and cultures and a better understanding of one’s role in the linguistic and cultural diversity” (p. 18).

2. The analysis of students’ representations about linguistic and cultural diversity, the plurilingual asset, their motivations/predispositions for language learning/interaction and the influence of previous languages in the learning of an additional language. While Bono and Stratilaki (2009) and Oliveira and Ançã (2009) highlight the need for taking into consideration and working on students’ representations about languages and the language learning process, as they determine language learning and use, Melo-Pfiefer (2015) presents drawings as a useful data collection methodology for understanding children’s perceptions about multilingualism and their multilingual selves, and as an instrument for the promotion of their ‘multilingual awareness’ and competence.
3 The reflection upon students’ experiences of migration and mobility and/or their plurilingual/cultural backgrounds and the way these influence their plurilingual identities and socio-affective profiles. Life-narratives (Oliveira and Ançã, 2009) and in-depth interviews (Moore, 2010) have emerged as privileged means of accessing students’ migration experiences, the processes underlying the construction of their plurilingual identities, and the way students’ autobiographical trajectories shape the development of their plurilingual awareness.

4 The development of strategies for working on students’ anxiety in the process of learning a language and fostering students’ self-esteem. Corcoll (2013) reports on the enhancement of students’ motivation, self-esteem and classroom atmosphere by the means of bringing more languages into the additional language classroom, namely the children’s L1s.

Even when researchers cannot, in light of their studies’ findings, claim a direct interdependence between students’ LA and their linguistic performances, they still argue for the important role played by LA in the development of the socio-affective, cognitive, metacognitive and interactional agility and flexibility on which PC relies, especially in formal education contexts. Indeed, ‘multilingual LA work’ seems to enhance, among other aspects, (a) the legitimization of students’ (or others’) languages and cultures at school (leading students to reflect upon the evolution of languages, relationships between languages, and also on the relative status they may acquire depending on multiple factors); (b) the development of open attitudes towards cultural diversity, students’ motivations regarding language learning and intercultural exchanges and, ultimately, the development of intercultural competences; (c) students’ awareness of their repertoires as an “integrated and multi-layered plurilingual ensemble, which can be mobilised and shared in particular and complex daily communicative situations” (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015), namely through the activation of prior linguistic knowledge and skills, the effective development of students’ competences at a cognitive, metacognitive and strategic level, the monitoring and self-regulation of the learning process, and the promotion of students’ confidence and self-esteem in the language learning process.

Which Teaching Approaches/Practices Are Used to Encourage Learners’ LA Within the Scope of the Development of their PC?

One of the results deriving from our corpus is the praise of bilingual programmes for fostering learners’ plurilingual development, by enhancing their ability to consciously engage with language(s) from multiple perspectives. Considering teaching and learning practices more specifically, three main approaches emerge as providing the best opportunities for teachers and learners to accomplish today’s language education goals: the Intercomprehension Approach, the Integrated Didactic Approach, and the Awakening to Languages approach.

Studies suggest the potentialities of the Intercomprehension Approach in activating students’ “funds of knowledge” through the co-construction of awareness-raising processes within the scope of exolingual interactional exchanges and/or plurilingual comprehension activities/tasks. Either at primary school (Alves and Mendes, 2006) or at university (Araújo e Sá and Melo, 2007; Downing, 2012), these approaches appear to boost the process of LA-raising (within languages of the same family or not), allowing...
students to cope with the plurilingual reality surrounding them, at least (but not exclusively), from a receptive (inter)comprehension perspective.

Within the scope of the Integrated Didactic Approach, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programmes are emphasized. Referring to studies such as those by Dagenais, Walsh, Armand and Maraille (2008), Maillat and Serra (2009) and de Zarobe and Coyle (2015), with slight variances in terms of aims, conceptual framework and features, researchers generally conclude that teaching content subjects by the means of two (or more) languages provides students with potentially rich learning environments in which thinking and talking about languages and their characteristics (LA) naturally arise.

The Awakening to Languages Approach appears in two intervention projects implemented in France and Portugal (Young and Helot, 2003; Lourenço and Andrade, 2014), at primary school and kindergarten levels, respectively, with the aim of developing indispensable skills and attitudes for language learning. These studies illustrate how LA’s promotion in the early school years provides pupils with solid ‘roots’ for the development of a sustainable PC.

In addition to these approaches, other teaching and learning methodologies and/or didactic tools have emerged as particularly relevant for activating students’ LA and developing their PC. The European Language Portfolio, for instance, conceived as a ‘companion piece’ to the CEFR, is presented as crucial for the development of competences in additional languages given its action-oriented approach, its focus on the promotion of students’ autonomy in the process of learning new languages and likewise its self-regulation purposes (Downing, 2012; Little, 2012). E-Learning methodologies, sustained by online platforms, such as Galanet (Araújo e Sá and Melo, 2007; Downing, 2012) – comprising synchronic and asynchronic communicational spaces – also emerge as important ‘exolingual settings’, enhancing the collaborative co-construction of meaning while simultaneously using different languages and, so, activating and developing students’ LA and PC.

The importance of collaborative work within the scope of PC and LA development is also highlighted in a dual language programme presented by Winstead (2013), in which self-regulated learning was promoted by making student speakers of different languages assume the role of peer teachers and peer learners in a mutually affirmative teaching and learning environment. By self-directing and adjusting their language teaching techniques in metacognitive ways for their language peers, students engaged in a “high order thinking, a willingness to learn and increased metacognition about language” (p. 16) which, ultimately, enhanced their communicative competence.

Collaborative work between students and teachers is stressed by de Zarobe and Coyle’s study (2015) on reciprocity and pedagogic attention: i.e. the necessity to assist teachers and learners in analysing “learning moments”. The authors suggest that making teachers and students co-researchers of their own practices helps learners to be more aware not only of how they learn, but also of how they can learn more efficiently.

Finally, pedagogically based code-switching and concept-based instruction also arise as important teaching and learning methodologies. Corcoll (2013) presents a case study with 7–8 year-old pupils learning English in which the pedagogically based use of their L1s favoured the learning process at the cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective levels. Henery (2015) argues for the key role of concept-based instruction in the development of students’ linguistic and metalinguistic competences in an additional language.
Focusing on a programme specifically designed for American students enrolled in a semester programme in France, she highlights the quality and systematic orientation of the students enrolled in this programme in terms of pragmatic practices and control of such mental actions.

The abovementioned studies emerge as pathways towards the development of PC by developing students’ LA. Indeed, they refer to the implementation of multilingual and multimodal teaching and learning approaches clearly relying on LA work for the promotion of integrated, transversal, and explicit/open discussions about language forms and functions, linguistic diversity, similarities/differences between languages, identity/cultural affiliations, power, representations, attitudes, and learning processes (activities/strategies).

**Final Considerations**

This chapter aimed at presenting an overview of research on the development of learners’ PC and LA. For this purpose, a literature review was conducted, which, despite providing a good insight into this issue, would need to be expanded, namely by integrating literature produced in other languages and circulating through different channels. Nonetheless, some important observations can be made on the basis of the results presented, which, in turn, may point researchers and teachers to future avenues for investigation and/or the implementation of didactic programmes within the scope of this theoretical framework.

A brief overview of the landscape of articles on this matter evinces an under-representation of studies targeting students from kindergarten, the last years of basic education (12–14 years old) and secondary education (15–18 years old), which poses some questions for researchers and practitioners: (a) Are the issues of PC and LA being equally addressed in all educational levels? (b) What are the factors obstructing/enhancing the development of studies in these particular educational levels? (c) Is there an ‘academic invisibility’ problem (difficulty of access, by schoolteachers, to indexed journals) underlying the dissemination of research/intervention projects conducted within this subject area?

Then, as data illustrates, there is an overrepresentation of studies related to the management of the linguistic and communicative repertoires and to the socio-affective dimensions of PC as well as to the cognitive and affective domains of LA, and, correspondingly, a small number of studies concerning the management of interaction and management of learning repertoires dimensions of PC and the social, power and performance domains of LA. Some questions can be raised on this matter: (a) Is the predominance of these dimensions/domains related to researchers/teachers’ convictions that the enhancement of students’ competences in these areas may have a greater impact on their overall PC? (b) Or do these tendencies correspond to a more traditionally based conception of the teaching and learning of languages (should teachers make students develop the necessary (meta)linguistic abilities/competences – in this case, in several languages – for guaranteeing their academic achievement?); (c) Is the small number of studies referring to the management of interaction and to the management of learning repertoires accidental? (d) Or does it illustrate teachers’ difficulty in promoting meaningful interaction among students? (e) Or does it reveal teachers’ difficulty in implementing self-awareness-raising learning activities that may help students become more autonomous, effective and critically aware language learners? While these questions
remain unanswered, they certainly provide glimpses into the ways ahead for those who consider that only a comprehensive and interrelated approach of these two core concepts (PC and LA) can provide teachers and students with the opportunity to accomplish contemporary education goals.

As far as didactic approaches are concerned, a range of teaching and learning practices at various school levels were presented as providing evidence of their appropriateness for the development of students’ PC and LA. However, some other possibilities could be explored considering information from our corpus. Although they were not referred to as methodologies for language teaching and learning, we would argue that some of the research practices mentioned could also be transformed into teaching and learning approaches. We refer particularly to the biographical approaches used by Oliveira and Ançã (2009), Moore (2010) and Melo-Pfeifer (2015). Indeed, while in the first study the narrative approach presented (the development of migrant students’ life narratives) appeared essentially as a research method, it also emerged as a privileged space for raising awareness, explicating and co-constructing knowledge about languages. In the other two studies, drawings (language silhouettes) also arose as potentially effective language learning instruments, able to account for and raise students’ awareness about linguistic and cultural diversity, linguistic phenomena and linguistic features, language learning and transmission, bilingual and individual resources and identifying affiliations.

We have examined the embryonic nature of the relationship between PC and LA, and the long path ahead in proving the unequivocal interdependence between these concepts. The overall conclusions point to the inevitability and urgency of continuing working on the interconnections between PC and LA, from the viewpoints both of researchers and practitioners, in order to fulfil the linguistic and educational goals of the Council of Europe.

Related Topics
Multi/plurilingualism; plurilingual competence

References


Ana Luísa Oliveira & Maria Helena Ançã


