

Curriculum Innovation and Teaching Methodology in French as a Foreign Language (FFL) Instruction

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Abstract: This paper aims at introducing a multimodal and plurilingual pedagogic framework that can be promising and beneficial in French as a Foreign Language (FFL) instruction. Through the incorporation of an Action-oriented Approach (AoA), this framework encompasses multimodal meaning-making, inclusion of plurilingual repertoire and emphasis on learners' agency. Benefits in promoting students' overall language and cultural literacy, and especially, the ability of cross-cultural mediation and meaning-making will be discussed, as well as the significance of multimodal resources that will be included. The second part of the paper consists of a course redesign with the integration of this framework, further exploring the possible intervention methods and pedagogical tasks in the FFL scenario. The course is situated in an university of International Studies in Shanghai, China, and is ideal for implementing this plurilingual and multimodal framework. General descriptions along with specific example concerning curriculum design, instruction methods and classroom activities will be discussed, as a case study to demonstrate its potential value for pedagogic implementation and further research.

1. Introduction

As educators, our mission lies not only in fostering students' overall competence development, but also in their flourishing generally. When it comes to language education, recurrent themes as well as novel subjects emerge from the evolution of the language pedagogy domain as well as the call for innovation in the new era. In this scenario, it is our responsibility to make ongoing ameliorations to the current curriculum and keep incorporating meaningful studies into the classroom intervention, with the aim to guarantee that our practices are both research-informed and relevant to the society.

Literacy and literacy development is undoubtedly a recurrent theme in language education. While traditionally being conceptualized as the ability to read and write, being literate in this day includes a lot more than that. To take a step further, there is an increasing emphasis on the ability to communicate effectively with multimodal meaning-making resources. Proposed by The New London Group (1996), the idea of multiliteracies points to the expanded notion of literacy beyond language learning, and this is achieved through multimodalities, referring to the various modes of

meaning-making, such as images, sound, gestures, animations, and others^[1].

Moreover, the domain of foreign language education has witnessed a plurilingual turn since the early 21st century. Plurilingualism, unlike traditional conceptualizations of languages such as bilingualism, multilingualism and code-switching, underlines the nature of languages as interrelating and interconnecting repertoires rather than static and separate systems, particularly, but not exclusively, at the level of the individual^[2]. Plurilingual pedagogy often makes use of the original repertoire of students and focuses on empowering them to make meaning of new linguistic and cultural knowledge in their own way. From the perspective of foreign language instruction, plurilingualism enjoys high value in developing language literacy for students, especially combined with multimodal methods.

In this article, following a brief literature review concerning multimodalities and plurilingualism, an Action-oriented Approach (AoA) will be introduced as the main pedagogical instruction method within the plurilingual and multimodal framework. The second part of the paper consists of a case study on redesigning a course with the integration of the framework, further exploring the possible intervention methods and pedagogical tasks in the FFL scenario. General descriptions along with specific examples concerning curriculum design, instruction methods and classroom activities will be discussed, to demonstrate its potential value for pedagogic implementation and further research.

2. Theoretical Framework

The construction of a theoretical framework is founded on the basis of past literature on relevant topics. While approaching each key notion independently then collectively, the framework aims to stand at the intersection of multiliteracies and plurilingualism, proposing an incorporated solution for the pedagogical challenge.

According to Galante et al., the pedagogical practices in higher education remain “highly monolingual”^[3], neglecting the opportunities to transform students’ plurilingual practices into valuable resources. This status quo also goes separate ways with current studies, indicating that teachers’ recognizing and valuing students’ plurilingual competence can be essential for more positive learning outcomes. As an exemplary study, Marshall and Moore find out that international students demonstrate high agency over their plurilingual competence in both academic and social settings, leveraging their linguistic range as a valuable tool for communication, even when the primary language of instruction is only English. Therefore, instructors are to provide suitable materials and implement pedagogic methods that can “harness students’ plurilingual practices”^[4]. A similar study conducted by Pauwels on how university instructors accommodated the increasingly diverse student language profile in Australian and the United Kingdom contexts arrived at similar conclusions, that despite being plurilingual themselves, most instructors showed minimal awareness or curiosity regarding their students’ linguistic diversity, often perceiving the students’ plurilingual practices as an annoyance^[5]. Therefore, there exists broad potential in the implementation of plurilingual modal in the modern higher education context, with the premise of the support of the instructor and suitable materials.

As Magnusson and Godhe point out, the increased use of technology, which “enables the combining of resources and makes it easier than ever to make meaning using a wide range of modalities and media”^[6], has affected the nature of what is communicated^[7]. As contemporary meaning-making evolves, educators shoulder the responsibility to explore how our students are experiencing them, and more importantly, in what manner can this be integrated into students’ learning process in language classrooms. As a matter of fact, several studies have explored methods of incorporation of multimodal learning and meaning-making across the curriculum, such as Baldwin, examining multimodal writing practices in the classroom and the challenge of

assessment^[8]. Nevertheless, few studies have been conducted merging the potential of plurilingualism and multimodalities as a pedagogic framework. Werner and Todeva even describe them as “the metanoia within reach” [9], stressing their transformative power in empowering learners with more agency and teachers with more opportunities and awareness to tap into students’ linguistic and cultural repertoire. Therefore, this plurilingual and multimodal framework is proposed here as a promising initiative in contemporary language classrooms, which can be implemented with the method of AoA.

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the Action-oriented Approach possesses the following characteristics: viewing learners as social agents, competence as situated action, affordances, language learning as mediated action, etc., with plurilingualism at the core^[10]. It is thus safe to draw the conclusion that AoA can be conceived as an ideal form of practice for putting this plurilingual and multimodal framework into practice, while valuing and employing learners’ myriad repertoire and resources, allowing for situated practice and meaning-making in multimodal manners.

3. Case Study: Implementing the framework and example of pedagogic tasks

In this part, a case study will be discussed as a demonstration of the potential value of this framework in promoting students’ literacy development, linguistic and cultural competence, as well as social agency in mediation and meaning-making.

To start with, background knowledge and general information of the case study will be provided, followed by a preliminary conception in redesigning the course within the current multimodal and plurilingual framework through the introduction of AoA pedagogical tasks.

The course we will delve into is situated in a university of International Studies in Shanghai, which is a fast-developing city with advanced economic industries. As one of the most diverse cities in China, it embraces and incorporates different languages and cultures. The French Speaking course is a part of a brand-new Sino-French collaboration program, in which students will study in France for a year after two years of learning French in China. In terms of students, 18 students are taking this course, with 15 Chinese students and 3 students respectively from Korea, Canada and Brazil. They all speak English (one with English as L1) and have varied levels of Chinese. All of the students have taken a year and a half of French classes, and are mostly at a level of B1 according to the CEFR.

Returning to the redesign, this course of French Speaking is a relatively old course that has existed for more than 60 years in the school curriculum. The objective of this course is to promote students’ listening and oral competence in French. For this newly-opened program, adjustments and ameliorations need to be made to the existing framework in order to better prepare our students for the incoming exchange in France.

Based on the aforementioned framework and the method of AoA, five elements will specifically be addressed in the redesigning of the course: diverse materials, real-world tasks, plurilingual interaction and mediation, integration of technology, and multimodal meaning-making. In the following part, detailed explanations of these aspects will be discussed through the demonstration of a representative class design as an example. This course plan includes the introduction from the teacher, presenting the real-life scenario, a step-by-step plurilingual task, and the final reflection. The class usually lasts for 1.5 hours.

To start with, the teacher will initiate with an introduction of the objective and process of the activity, to increase engagement, learning awareness and active meaning-making of the students (5 min). The scenario, which is carefully designed in line with the framework and in accordance with the curriculum objective, will then be presented to the students. The real-life scenario and concrete

steps are listed as follows, with a distributed time for each step.

3.1 Scenario

After you have arrived in France, you are enrolled in a geography course for your new semester. In order to facilitate the integration of international students, the teacher has created an assignment called *Une ville, Une histoire* (a city, a story), as an opportunity for students to talk about their unique experiences and memories with a place or a city. During the preparation process, your new friend Lea, wants to have your opinion on her talk as well.

3.2 Step-by step AoA Task: (1h 15min)

Step 1: *Quelle ville ? Quelle histoire ?* --- Settling down the theme (10 min)

In the first step of the task, the teacher will start by playing a 3-minute clip from a video about peers talking with each other about their cities and stories, in order to initiate the students on the reflection on settling down their topic. The students will then be divided into five groups of 3-4 people and discuss together about the city and possible story that they will narrate later. The conversation will take place in Chinese, English or French for the convenience of interaction. This step aims at providing insights and possible directions through video as well as perspectives from peers for students to prepare for future procedures.

Step 2: Data collection --- Searching on the Internet (15 min)

After developing a preliminary plan for the speech, the students now have opportunities to access the Internet and search for the information they may need, for example, using the translator to check their ideas, searching for the history, background, or features of the city, etc. In this phase, an additional video on how to introduce your city in French is also provided to the students in case they want to learn more. The information collection process contains multilingual and multimodal facets, and aims at preparing students for the writing practice in the following part.

Step 3: Write your own story! (25 min)

The previous two preparing activities have led students to the critical step: redact a short writing that corresponds to a speech of three minutes. The writing does not need to necessarily follow the academic requirements, in other words, students may choose to write in a way that best facilitates their oral production in the culminating task. Forms can vary from standard paragraphs, to creating mind maps with details of the story, to combining drafts with drawings that they will later present to their peers. In addition, plurilingual and translanguaging writing is welcome in this process, as long as languages are employed to help students express meaning in a more effective and advantageous fashion.

25 minutes are allocated to the students for the completion of their multimodal and multilingual writing. During this process, students do not have access to digital translators, with the objective of encouraging mediation and individual meaning-making through their own knowledge and repertoire.

Step 4: *Que pensez-vous de mon exposé ?* --- Presentation and discussion (25 min)

In the final culminating task, the presentation and discussion process will take place in groups, as divided in the first step. The teacher will start with a short guiding talk underpinning the procedure as well as some important notices of the group work. To start with, students will go around and present their *Une ville, Une histoire* talk based on the writing they accomplished in the previous step. After each speech of the student, the other group members will respectively provide their feedback on the monologue, including the main content of the talk, their opinions and future suggestions for improvement. Here, a document of sentence structure list on giving opinions in French will be provided to the students to promote the flow of conversation. By taking turns, each

student will have the opportunity to present first, and receive feedback later.

Given the restriction of time, the whole group work will continue for about 25 minutes, which should be enough for students to exchange their speeches and opinions on them. Nevertheless, if time permits, it is highly recommended that we add a further step consisting of post-feedback formal presentations, during which students will have time to make adjustments and ameliorations on their writing and speech based on the peer feedback and deliver a better-prepared monologue. This complementary process will also serve to make this task better resemble the actual scenario, in which students will have more time to revise and improve their speech after the opinions from their friend.

3.3 Final Reflection (10 min)

After the completion of the task, the rest of the class will be dedicated to the reflection session, where students will fill out a reflection table/journal evaluating their learning outcomes, experiences and other ideas that emerge from the self-examination. This can act as an efficient and advantageous way for reviewing their activity, recognizing not only what they have learned, but also aspects where they see the need for further improvement. Compared to general quantitative feedback from the teacher, this process can better engage students in active reflection and further development.

As can be seen in the description of the task, the aforementioned five elements are indispensable threads connecting the general design of the lesson plan. Diverse materials, such as videos in different genres (an animated video with more informal dialogue, and a more formal video focusing on sentence structure and grammar), a list of adjectives and sentence structure. Other forms are also to be included in future tasks, such as theater, music and movie clips on culture-related topics. Real-world tasks lie as a foundation on which we build our tasks, as this framework possesses a practical nature. In addition, plurilingual and translingual interaction and mediation can be found in almost every step of the task, including searching for information, writing in plurilingual and multimodal ways (drawings and mind maps are welcomed to produce meaning-making works), and the final opinion exchange. Moreover, the integration of technology, which is an inevitable feature of modern classrooms, is reflected in the information-gathering process and the authentic materials offered by the teacher. Last but not least, we can observe multimodal meaning-making in the peer interaction and central writing task, which can be further incorporated in diverse contexts, for example, when you get lost in the city and need to use Google Maps to find directions^[11]; or to create a video on cooking your favorite traditional dish.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, a theoretical framework that stands at the intersection of plurilingualism and multimodality is proposed, as an innovative and promising answer to the challenge we educators are now facing, on the continuing evolution of technology and the multimodal ways of meaning-making, on the need to increase awareness for recognizing and harnessing learners' plurilingual experiences and valuable repertoire that they bring to the language classrooms, and more importantly, on empowering and cultivating our students into responsible social agents with more linguistic and cultural competence, more agency in mediation and multimodal meaning-making, and more comprehensive literacy development. This paper bears a practical nature, through the case study which explores a redesign of a French speaking course in the context of China, the framework has demonstrated great potential in providing learners with more opportunities to make use of their own repertoire, make meaning and create multimodal texts and dialogues according to their agency. Finally, more research is still need to further explore the myriad scenarios in which this framework can be implemented. The process and form of formative

assessment or other evaluation methods are to be considered as well.

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