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Key Concepts in Describing Plurilingualism: A Brief Glossary

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The presence of multiple languages in European states

European states are **multilingual** in nature as more than one language has been spoken in their territories throughout their history. Just to cite an example, the United Kingdom is, traditionally, the home of **living languages** such as Angloromani, Cornish, English, Irish, Scots, Scottish Gaelic, Shelta, Welsh and three **sign languages**. Some languages are given a special legal status, that is, they are **official**, in a state or in part of that state's territory, others are not. For example, Spanish is the only official language in most territories in Spain but it is **co-official** with Catalan in Catalonia, with Basque in the Basque Country or with Galician in Galicia. Unfortunately, not all **local languages** in a territory (e.g. *Bable* in Asturias, Spain) have gained the status of official language, which means their speakers do not always have their **linguistic rights** guaranteed. Globalization and migration movements add **language diversity** to a territory, which explain, for instance, why Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, Filipino, French, Hungarian, Italian, Russian or Turkish are just some of the languages spoken in Ireland today.

The presence of many languages and language varieties in a territory often makes it necessary for citizens to choose a **lingua franca** to communicate: a language they all know. Today, English is the lingua franca most widely used among European citizens. Sometimes even Speakers who share the same language may need to use a lingua franca, because not all **varieties** of a language are always **mutually understandable**. Imagine, for example, two Arabic speakers who live in Sweden. One is from Morocco, the other from Syria. The Moroccan-born Arabic speaker may choose to speak Swedish with the Syrian-born Arabic speaker because it is easier for them to understand each other.

Although **languages choices** are individual in nature, they are also determined by the rules operating in each **community of practice** a person belongs to, as each community creates their own, not always overt, rules regarding which languages are legitimate. For instance, a German citizen Kurdish doctor may use this language at home, German at work, Arabic at the mosque, and English at conferences. The same can be said about schools. They have their own rules regarding which languages are accepted (in the classrooms, at the playground, to address written information to families, etc.). Sometimes these rules are explicit, for example, in an English classroom the teacher might insist that the students only use English.

The competences of plurilingual speakers

A state can be multilingual even though many of their speakers declare themselves **monolinguals**. Yet, being exposed to just one language is a rare situation nowadays. Most EU citizens are **bilingual** or **plurilingual** speakers as they can take part in **communicative situations** in more than one language. This does not mean, however, that they master all the languages they are in contact with. Speakers can develop either **full competences** or **partial competences** in those languages. Having full competence in a language allow speakers to take part in all sort of communicative situations using **unilingual procedures**, that is, mostly through that language only. Having partial competences in a language allows speakers to undertake certain communicative actions through it. For example, Italian speakers may comprehend well a text written in Portuguese but may not be able to talk in Portuguese. That is, speakers with full competence in a Romance language can easily develop partial competences in another Romance language. Yet, the concept is not only valid with **languages from the same family**. The **exposure** to a given language or culture also nurtures people's **plurilingual competences**. Partial competences, for example, may simply refer to the ability of recognizing a language when you hear it or see it written, either because you are familiar with certain words or sounds or with an alphabet system.

Speakers' linguistic repertoires

The **linguistic repertoire** of plurilingual speakers is made of all the languages they possess knowledge of, regardless of whether they have full or various degrees of partial competences in them. For example, to complete a classroom task which requires learners to create, in English, a dialogue between a shop assistant and a customer, the two primary students in extract 1 are making use of the three **shared languages** they have available in their individual repertoires: Catalan, Spanish and English. The two children were born in Catalonia. Urdu and Panjabi are also part of Bawna's repertoire but not of Pau's. The three languages the two children share are also the languages whose use is accepted in the community of practice they belong to at that moment: the English class. The use of Catalan or Spanish by each of the children is a personal choice determined by the fact that their competence in English is still not fully developed.

1.	PAU:	*eres tú que eres el cliente*	[it's you, who is the customer]
2.	BAWNA:	it's a a a *deu mil* money	[ten thousand]
3.	PAU:	*deu mil* no, *deu mil* moneys	[ten thousand]
4.	BAWNA:	a ten	
5.	PAU:	er…	
6.	BAWNA:	ten thousand	
7.	PAU:	ten thousand moneys	
8.	BAWNA:	[incomprehensible fragment]	
9.	PAU:	yes, yes, *es que sube. It's up, it's up, navideit*	[navideit:invented word]
10.	BAWNA:	thank you	
11.	PAU:	thank you, bye bye	

Extract 1: Conversation between two 12-year-old children who are scripting a role play in the English class.

Learning a new language means activating one's linguistic repertoire and using it as a **scaffolding procedure**, that is, as an aid when communicating. Communication in a new language is always a process which occurs in a **plurilingual mode**, which means that to sustain the **flow of**

communication, emergent bilingual or plurilingual speakers make use of **plurilingual procedures,** such as **code-switching** and **code mixing**, among others, as we observed in extract 1.

Code switching, changing from one language to another, always play a role in a conversation. For example, in extract the two kids conduct in English the task of creating the script of a role play. Yet, in line 1, Pau switches to Spanish to clarify to his partner who should speak next. So, he stops doing the task of creating a dialogue to discuss how to do that task. This shift is the focus of attention is indicated with a code-switch.

Code mixing, using more than one language to create meaning, is a scaffolding procedure that indicates that learners are making positive steps towards the development of a new language. This is the case of Bawna in line 2 and of Pau in line 9. In the case of the girl, she first produces a mixed utterance, half in Catalan half in English to propose a line for the role play (*deu mil moneys*, line 2), but then she subsequently replaces Catalan by English (ten thousand, lines 4 and 6). Pau's follows the same procedure in line 9, when he first produces a sentence half in English, half in Spanish (yes, yes, *es que sube* –prices increase) and then produces it in English by employing a word similar in meaning (it's up - prices increase when they go up). This sentence is completed with another example of code mixing, in this case of a lexical item. As Pau does not know how to say Christmas in English, he uses the Spanish word (*navidad*) with an ending which sounds English to him (*navideit*, line 9). Pau's decision of not using Spanish to overcome a language obstacle but a hybrid form indicates his willingness to conduct the school task just in the **target language**, the language being learnt.

The use of plurilingual procedures to communicate is not an exclusive practice of emergent bilingual or and plurilingual speakers. Speakers with fully competences in more than one language switch very often from one to another for communicative purposes. Thus, if the ability to rely on code-switching and code-mixing mechanisms in inherent to the communicative competence of bi-/plurilingual speakers, classroom communication in a plurilingual mode should be accepted and enhanced.

Concluding comments

Speakers' use of the languages in their repertoire to construct a discourse in a language in which they have partial competences in is a practice that guarantees the development of the new language and should be encouraged in the classrooms. Similarly, the **family languages** of all learners should have a role at schools as learning tools. Therefore, it is advisable to open the classroom to them by, for example, planning activities to awaken students to linguistic diversity, allowing students to choose the language in which they want to search for information when needed, designing activities in which students can compare languages, etc.

References
Classroom materials related to the promotion of plurilingual education:
https://www.edilic.org/copie-de-ressources-materiaux
http://carap.ecml.at/
A catalogue of the languages in the world:
https://www.ethnologue.com/