



## Pluralistic Approaches to Language Learning: Sample Projects for Language Education in Diversity

<sup>1</sup>Olga Ivanova, <sup>2</sup>Vega Llorente

<sup>1</sup>University of Salamanca, <sup>2</sup>Official School of Languages of Salamanca (Spain)

[olga.ivanova@usal.es](mailto:olga.ivanova@usal.es), [vegalllorente@gmail.com](mailto:vegalllorente@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*Appealing to pluralistic approaches to language learning, defined by A framework of reference for pluralistic approaches as those involving more than one language and cultural varieties, seems fairly relevant in the modern multilingual world. Pluralistic approaches consider both societal multilingualism and individual plurilingualism: they benefit the involvement of all languages surrounding learners and thus contribute to the maintenance and positive evaluation of linguistic and cultural diversity. In this sense, pluralistic approaches to language learning are an innovative and efficient response to new educational demands of the multicultural and multilingual world.*

*However, application of pluralistic approaches to language learning is still limited to one-off cases. On one hand, this is due to methodological doubts that language teachers may have as for implementation of four pluralistic approaches (awakening to languages, intercomprehension, integrated didactic and intercultural) in their daily teaching. On the other hand, this is the question of educational curricula and the possibility of integration of pluralistic approaches in their contents.*

*In the light of these considerations, we would like to share our experience in the application of pluralistic approaches to language learning, which is compatible with different curricula profiles and displays clearly what the methodological features of each approach are. Our aim is to present three extracurricular projects, each of them mainly based on one of the pluralistic approaches, which have been developed and implemented by the Salamanca Plurilingüe group from the Official School of Languages of Salamanca. These projects are: (1.) El Despertar a las Lenguas, based on the awakening to languages approach; (2.) Descubre tus habilidades plurilingües e interculturales, based on the integrated didactic and awakening to languages approaches; and (3.) El teatro plurilingüe, based on the intercomprehension approach. All of them consider the intercultural approach as well.*

*By expounding the chief theoretical concerns about pluralistic approaches to language learning, we submit our methodological proposals for integrating of extracurricular languages and involving of pupils of all ages into the process of reflection about their linguistic and cultural diversity. We strive for encouraging of the pedagogical audience in consideration of pluralistic approaches as one of the most appropriate standpoints as for the modern multilingual society and for dissemination of the FREPA project within the educational community.*

### 1. Pluralistic approaches to language learning and their application

According to *A Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to languages and cultures* (FREPA) [1], pluralistic approaches (PA hereafter) are didactic approaches involving more than one language and cultural varieties in the learning process. They are different to singular approaches, which are concerned with one language and cultural variety taken separately [2: 75]. PA value learners' language proficiency and are fundamentally aimed at giving an educational response to the "challenge of the diversity of languages spoken" [3: 20]. They provide for new educational demands, which look for securing "the establishment of pluralistic views and an intercultural understanding of a multicultural social environment" [4: 11], giving a practical answer to the issues of linguistic diversity.

The idea of PA is decidedly related to the notion of plurilingual and pluricultural competence [1; 4]. CEFR defines it as "the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction" [5: 168]. In accordance with this definition, FREPA sets forth a range of knowledge, attitudes and skills that learners ought to develop in order to improve their plurilingual and pluricultural competence. In due course, PA involve these knowledge, attitudes and skills as target commands of the learning process.

FREPA and other didactic materials available from the European Centre for Modern Languages provide resources for application of PA. However, their practical engagement is still restricted to one-off cases owing to the matter of integration of PA into educational curricula and to methodological



doubts that language teachers may have relative to their implementation. The latter reason may be amended thereon good experimental practices.

This paper aims to share the experience that the *Salamanca Plurilingüe* group, made of teachers from the Official School of Languages of Salamanca and their external collaborators, has developed in application of PA. It is about three projects based on the FREPA postulates and compatible with different curricula profiles in view of their extracurricular accessibility. Each project is primarily based on one of four PA; in such a way, their descriptions display clearly what the methodological features of each PA are.

## 2. Three projects for application of pluralistic approaches to language learning

There are four PA: the intercultural approach, integrated didactics, intercomprehension of related languages and awakening to languages. PA vary in terms of goals, objectives and expected outcomes, though all of them contribute to the development of plurilingual and pluricultural competence.

Separate application of PA is possible but uncommon, as intercultural approach will usually go with any didactic proposal involving more than one language. This is the case of our projects, which are primarily based on one PA but acknowledge interculturality and make space for pluralistic introspections.

The three projects were created in response to lack of reference to learners' linguistic and cultural experiences in the Spanish educational system. In line with CEFR, these projects intend to educate learners as intercultural speakers and to make them think about language acquisition. Their chief goals are to make learners: identify and understand unknown languages; think over communicative and comprehension strategies; know how to use competences in one language for understanding other languages; know that relying on similarities among languages facilitates language acquisition; know differences and similarities among different cultures; know how to formulate hypothesis about structures/functioning of a language on the basis of simultaneous observation of some languages; know that cultural differences may cause difficulties in communication and interaction; know how to explain misunderstanding and how to negotiate. Their comprehensive intention is to make learners aware about their capacity to understand and interact in order to prepare them for the daily multilingualism.

### 2.1. Applying the *awakening to languages* approach: *El Despertar a las Lenguas*

*Awakening to languages* concerns languages "which the school does not set out to teach" [2: 77] and is aimed at introducing learners into linguistic diversity. Didactic activities based on this approach involve all languages proceeding from the learner's setting. Its purpose is to contribute to the development of positive attitudes towards multilingualism and multiculturalism, and to provide learners with primary learning strategies [6: 236].

*El Despertar a las Lenguas (Awakening to Languages)* project is an example of application of the awakening to languages approach. Created and implemented by Vega Llorente, Magdalena Iglesias, Teresa Vicente, Benimar García and Miguel Ángel Belver, this project makes a 60 minutes activity aimed at the primary school pupils between 7 and 9 years old. It involves five target languages (French, Italian, German, English and Portuguese), Spanish and all language varieties own to learners. This project has been implemented since December 2009 till May 2013.

The objective of *El Despertar a las Lenguas* is to prepare pupils to linguistic and cultural diversity. Learners are divided into five groups and "adopt" different nationalities: French, Italian, German, British and Portuguese. They "travel" around Europe and learn greetings and farewells in five languages; finally, they know cultural customs of different European countries and sing in different languages. In this way, they learn that it is necessary, funny and even easy to study languages and to be in contact with people from other cultures.

*El Despertar a las Lenguas* includes five stages: (1.) Distribution of nationalities. Pupils are divided into five groups differentiated by national flags. (2.) Acquaintance with Europe. Pupils enter into a hall with a map of Europe drawn on the floor. They have to recognize different European countries and languages spoken in each of them. (3.) Becoming familiar with new language and nationality. Pupils learn to greet and farewell in five languages. (4.) A trip around Europe. Pupils are tourists "traveling" from one country to another. They greet their "hosts" in the language of the host country. (5.) Speaking



about customs. Pupils are told about how Christmas and birthdays are celebrated in each country. At the end, they sing in all languages.

## 2.2. Applying the *integrated didactics* approach: **Descubre tus habilidades plurilingües e interculturales**

*Integrated didactics* sets a prospective focus on languages studied at school [6]. Its aim is to make learners associate a number of languages which are expected to be taught [2]. The known languages are used as facilitators of acquisition of new languages and, thus, promote a continuous comparison of language systems.

Integrated didactics is frequently appealed to in school curricula as it may be an effective way to develop language consciousness. In extracurricular practice, it has been applied in the *Descubre tus habilidades plurilingües e interculturales* (*Discover your plurilingual and intercultural skills*) project, designed and performed by Vega Llorente, Magdalena Iglesias, Teresa Vicente, Benimar García and Miguel Ángel Belver. This 90 minutes activity, also considering the other three PA, is directed to young teenagers (13-14-year-olds) and involves, but for Spanish, French, Italian, German, English and Croatian, invented languages.

The chief idea of this project stands for acquisition of languages after languages; it states that it is easy to understand and learn new languages after the languages known.

The project includes three stages: (1.) "It is easy to understand and learn languages if I speak Spanish and English". Learners are divided into four groups and gather to four teachers around separate tables. They do a multilingual puzzle of phrases from different languages and correct their answer with the coordinator. Language teachers will explain learners how to pronounce phrases in all languages. (2.) "It is easy to get on even if we speak different languages: communicative strategies". Learners watch a fragment from the "Un franco, 14 pesetas" movie, which speaks about Spanish emigration in Switzerland in the 1960s. This is an activity for audiovisual comprehension of four languages, from which three – French, Italian and German – are initially unknown to learners. They are expected to understand the fragment after their skills in other languages and through applying comprehension strategies. It is particularly stressed on the necessity to be cognizant of some peculiarities of the native culture relative to customs from other cultures in order to avoid misunderstandings. (3.) "The International Summit: be an international speaker". Now, the four groups are renamed as "ilandeses", "ulandeses", "international observers for ilandeses" and "international observers for ulandeses". "Ilandeses" speak using "i" while "ulandeses" speak using "u"; both of them use mimics and gestures to make themselves understood. They greet each other, explain what they want, thank and farewell. "Negotiations" will be interrupted in case somebody makes something strange, disrespectful or offensive, and learners will have to analyze why the interruption occurred. The objective is to make learners observe attentively the way in which their mates interact and what their customs and languages are like.

## 2.3. Applying the *intercomprehension* approach: **El Teatro Plurilingüe**

*Intercomprehension* favors a converging work on several languages proceeding from the same language family [2]. It grants for language inferences in learners so that to make them conscious about their ability to understand new languages.

*El Teatro Plurilingüe* (*The Plurilingual Theater*) is an example of the intercomprehension approach application. This project, created and coordinated by Olga Ivanova, is aimed at all-age learners and concerns Spanish, English, French, German, Italian and Portuguese languages, as well as Spanglish, Portuñol and other mixed varieties. The chief intention of *El teatro plurilingüe* is to raise learners' awareness about their ability to understand unknown languages and about cultural and linguistic misunderstandings social multilingualism may entail.

This 60 minute project consists of nine scenes represented to adult pupils of the Official School of Languages of Salamanca. Spectators are not passive recipients: they are involved through participating in a global survey, which takes place between scenes. At each break, learners are asked to answer two questions, which suggest them to reflect on why misunderstandings occur. The work of theater used in this activity was written by Olga Ivanova under title "*Vuelo con destino a...*" (*A flight bound for...*). Numerous false friends and interferences are played with in the work in order to turn learners conscious about vulnerabilities and possibilities of multilingualisms.



### 3. Conclusions

PA make an innovative and necessary methodology in language learning in the modern multilingual world. In contrast to traditional methods in language teaching, PA consider our society as multilingual and multicultural, and stand up for the development of plurilingual and pluricultural competence of each speaker.

Though it seems clear that PA go in line with current social necessities, their application is far from desirable. In part, this is due to methodological doubts that their application may cause in language teachers. In this paper we have tried to contribute to the solution of these doubts through sharing of our own experience in application of the intercultural, integrated didactics, awakening to languages and intercomprehension approaches. We sincerely hope that it will encourage language teachers to consider PA in their pedagogical practice in order to lean towards plurilingual education in our multilingual world.

### References

- [1] Candelier, M. (coord.) (2012): *A Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to languages and cultures. Competences and resources*. Graz: ECML.
- [2] Candelier, M. (2010): Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches (FREPA) to languages and cultures – A tool for dealing with diversity in schools. In: *Policies and practices for teaching sociocultural diversity. Diversity and inclusion: challenges for teacher education*, p. 75-82. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- [3] Candelier, M. (2003): The Political Context: a set of principles and aims. In Heyworth (ed.), *Challenges and Opportunities in Language Education. The Contributions of the European Centre for Modern Languages 2000-2003*, 19-31. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- [4] Giselbrecht, M. (2009): Pluralistic approaches – A long overdue paradigm shift in education. *Scottish Languages Review*, 20.11-20.
- [5] *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (2011): Council of Europe.
- [6] Vetter, E. (2012): Multilingualism Pedagogy: Building Bridges between Languages. In Hüttner et al. (eds.), *Theory and Practice in EFL Teacher Education: Bridging the Gap*, 228-246. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.