



Helping learners to build an informed understanding and representations of linguistic and cultural diversity



Document for teacher educators

Research, particularly in educational settings, has long linked representations of languages to the desire to learn languages and to the success or failure of this learning. Various lines of analysis, as well as different didactic approaches, focus both on elucidating and analysing the representations linked to languages, with the aim of facilitating more favourable repositioning for learning (Castellotti and Moore, 2002). This is why in this sequence we propose reflective work on representations concerning linguistic, cultural, and educational diversity. The aim is to facilitate teaching approaches focusing on this dimension with learners in the classroom.

Targeted competence	
Dimension 5	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competence in helping learners to build informed representations of linguistic and cultural diversity. 5.2-n 	

Related competence	
Dimension 7	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competence in developing one's own values and principles regarding linguistic and cultural diversity and plurilingual and intercultural education. 7.1 	

Scenario

Reminder: The scenarios provide an overview of the sequence and highlight some of the possible alternatives.

Estimated overall length: 2 hours

Steps	Aims	Tasks	Remarks
Step 1 Differentiating between knowledge and opinions about languages	To facilitate the development of competence in analysing discourse and identifying which elements relate to knowledge and to opinions.	1. Participants individually identify their own knowledge and opinions about the languages they know. They then discuss this, looking out for any repetitions and explaining them. 2. By filling in a table, participants analyse extracts of texts containing knowledge and opinions about languages.	

<p>Step 2</p> <p>Raising learners' awareness of language representations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To facilitate the development of competence in analysing learners' representations of languages. - To facilitate the development of planning competences to raise learners' awareness of these issues. 	<p>3. Participants discuss the potential use in the classroom of a corpus of learners' responses to the question: "Among the languages you know, which one seems the easiest to you and why? "</p> <p>They also answer the question for themselves.</p>	<p>Alternative</p> <p>- Other corpora can be used, e.g. answers about which language is "the most difficult", "the most beautiful", "the most musical", etc. Participants could be asked to first work it in small groups, then compare their answers and report back to the teacher educator only on what surprised them.</p>
<p>Step 3</p> <p>Interacting with learners about representations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To facilitate the anticipation of classroom situations that might be generated by work on language representations and how to manage them. - To facilitate the development of competence in interacting with learners on these issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - in order to raise their awareness of their own attitudes and representations and describe them - in order to be able to manage interactions among learners about these attitudes and representations, even in 	<p>4. The participants read extracts from learners' language biographies concerning their mother tongues, then make a selection and formulate questions about them for discussion a) in a teacher education session b) in class with learners.</p> <p>They discuss the impact of such work on communication in the classroom.</p>	<p>Alternative</p> <p>- Other language biographies can be used, for example those of learners.</p> <p>Both types of questioning, a) and b), are necessary: they refer to different pedagogical intentions.</p>

	situations where one strongly disagrees with some of them.		
Step 4 Self-assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To prompt reflection on what one has gained from this sequence: what one has learned about representations and what might have changed in one's own representations. - To encourage reflection on the impact of the work done here on one's future practice. 	5. Participants answer questions about what they have learned, what representations they have changed and what they will put into practice in future.	During the discussion, the participants can be asked to express their thoughts about their interest in and their openness to the diversity of linguistic and cultural phenomena (see dimension 1 of the framework).

Tasks

N.B. : To make it easier for teacher educators to relate the information given here with the suggested tasks , the rounded boxes provide a quick overview of the tasks as they appear in the document intended for participants.

Step 1 : Differentiating between knowledge and opinions about languages

Brief terminological reminder regarding representations, knowledge, opinions and stereotypes in relation to languages

A box providing definitions of representations, opinions and stereotypes allows participants to inform themselves and/or align the terminology that will be used in the following tasks.

1. They are then invited, individually, to examine their own representations of the languages they know and to differentiate between knowledge and opinion. The group discussion that follows aims to elicit

Step 1 Differentiating between knowledge and opinions about languages

A reminder:

Discourse on languages very often blends different types of knowledge, opinions and stereotypes, in ways that are sometimes difficult to identify. Below are some explanations that might help you distinguish between these.

'Representations' are defined as a set of knowledge, opinions, and mental constructs (about the sciences, religion, myths, space, time) that are widely shared among individuals in society. As "digests of experience" (Kayser 1997: 7), they provide a framework for utilising knowledge, trigger educated guesses that facilitate mutual understanding, and guide behaviour (Castellotti & Moore 2002: 10).

As social representations, 'stereotypes' are generally considered a specific way of voicing attitudes, characterised by the agreement among members of the same group regarding certain traits which are adopted as valid and distinctive in describing another (a stranger) in terms of his/her differences (Tajfel 1981: 115). They are characterised by the fact that they fix a truth that is not substantiated or may even be false. By proposing a simplifying frame of reference based on assumptions, they distort and impoverish social reality.

1. Individually, make a list of the languages you believe you know. For each one, list three characteristics that you think are based on knowledge and three characteristics that are based on opinion and/or stereotypes. Then, in groups of three, compare your answers. For the languages that are mentioned more than once in your answers, are there any elements that are repeated? Are they more likely to be in the knowledge column or in the opinion and/or stereotype column? Why do you think this is?

knowledge about languages, to separate knowledge from opinion and to gain insight into the issue of how languages are represented in discourse.

2. After this personal exploration of the representations present in their own discourse on languages, participants are invited to conduct a similar analysis of discourse of various origins. This analysis is carried out using a table in which they categorise the elements identified as either knowledge or opinion and/or stereotypes.

Examples of extracts:

- a. According to the website ethnologue.com, there are nearly 1.2 billion native Chinese speakers, of which nearly 1 billion speak Mandarin. These are in China, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, but there are also large communities in: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Mauritius, Mongolia, Philippines, Russia, Thailand, UK, USA, Vietnam, France. Chinese is a language itself composed of thirteen languages and dialects based on the same script. Mandarin, of course, is the most widely used language, but so are Wu or Cantonese, for example.

2. In the following extracts, elements related to knowledge and/or opinions/stereotypes are mixed. Complete the table, trying to distinguish between them.

The language referred to	Knowledge	Opinions and/or stereotypes
a		
b		
c		

Step 2: Raising learners' awareness of language representations

3. The analysis of discourse about languages will now focus on statements made by learners. Here the analysis focuses on extracts from the answers given by Romanian learners aged 13-14 to the question *Among the languages you know, which one seems the easiest to you and why?*

Representations that individuals have about languages play a significant role in language learning and in the development of intercultural competence. It is therefore useful to address these issues with learners. This step focuses on planning class work aimed at raising awareness among learners of issues related to language representations, while still encouraging personal reflection among participants, by asking: “And for you, which of the languages you know seems to be the easiest? Why?”

3. The following sentences are taken from responses provided by 13–14-year-old Romanian learners to the question: *Among the languages you know, which one seems the easiest to you and why?*

What could you do in class with such a corpus? How could you exploit it to raise learners' awareness of the diversity of sources and types of representations one can have about languages?

And as a participant, which of the languages you know seems the easiest? Why?

Examples of extracts:

Romanian is the easiest because it is my native language. (O.Y., 12 years old)

English because I love it. (I.E., 11 years old)

French because it resembles Romanian. (M.H., 12 years old)

Turkish is the easiest language because I speak it at home. (H.N., 14 years old)

Romanian, because it is the language I speak at home. (K.B., 13 years old)

Romanian, because it was the first language I learned. (H.G., 13 years old)

Step 3: Interacting with learners about representations

4. The aim here is to develop competence in anticipating and managing interactions with learners regarding representations.

Extracts from the language biographies of Romanian learners are used; they could of course be replaced by extracts from language biographies of local learners. These extracts serve as a basis for reflecting on issues that may arise when working with learners.

Participants are asked to select three extracts and explain their choices (including the reasons why they did not select certain other extracts). This work prompts reflection on the identification of themes suitable for classroom work. Participants may avoid certain extracts/themes because of discomfort or apprehension about discussing them with learners in class. It is beneficial to discuss this with a view to developing competences in addressing sensitive issues with learners. Inviting participants to formulate questions they would ask about the extracts a) in a teacher education context and b) in class with learners, encourages discussion of these issues and how to manage them in the classroom. Identifying certain phenomena, such as over-generalisations for example, can facilitate the development of strategies for doing so.

4. Below, there are six extracts from the language biographies of Romanian learners aged 12-14. They particularly focus on the subjects' mother tongue. Choose three of these extracts and, in groups of three:

- a. Say why you have chosen these three extracts and not the others
- b. Formulate four or five questions you would ask about them:
 - a) in a teacher education session
 - b) in a lesson with learners.

Discuss the questions you have formulated and their potential impact on classroom communication (potential conflict, opening towards issues related to overgeneralizations, ways to counteract these phenomena in the classroom, etc.).

Extracts from language biographies

1. *I am Aromanian, but I consider my mother tongue to be Romanian; since I was little, my Aromanian parents and relatives spoke Aromanian, but I answered them in Romanian; Aromanian seems a bit ugly to me; in most situations I speak Aromanian when I get angry: 'cap di cupaci'.* (M.C., 12 years old)
2. *English was the third language I encountered, in first class, with Mrs P. From first class onwards, I started watching youtubers who spoke English. Because I wanted to learn English*

Step 4 Self-evaluation

5. This step provides an opportunity to take stock of what has been learned and to develop participants' reflection skills. It focuses on the acquisition of knowledge, on the possible modification of representations and on progress made in relation to the management of the sensitive issues discussed above.

5. What do you think you have learned to do during this sequence?

Give an example of knowledge about languages that you believe you've learned during this sequence. Give an example of an opinion about languages that you believe you've changed during this sequence.

Complete the following sentence based on how you feel at the end of this sequence:

When facing a challenging situation created by students in class regarding languages, I will...