Jonathan DURANDIN

TOWARDS LEARNERS' EMPOWERMENT AND PLURILINGUALISM IN FFL DIDACTICS AT UNIVERSITY? THE LATVIAN CASE

Summary. In fifty years, language didactics has evolved towards learner-speaker autonomy and multilingualism. Facing this evolution encouraged by the European institutions, how do the European teachers of FFL at university consider their role of citizens and future FFL teacher trainers? What does the implementation of didactics favouring learners' empowerment and multilingualism depend on? Considering the situation in Latvia, it is torn between the Soviet past, European institutional directives and ethnocentric values. The paper presents the results of a comprehensive and qualitative research work on speech analysis. The central components of FFL Latvian University teachers' representations on foreign languages didactics and on their professional practical experiences are presented, considering simultaneously national and supranational official guidance since the 1980s. Finally, conclusions are drawn on elements which may influence the creation of a FFL didactics in Latvia based on learner's empowerment and plurlingualism. It brings eventually to suggestions for FFL and foreign language teacher education evolution in Latvia and possibly in other countries in Europe.

Keywords: Latvia, contextualisation of European institutional guidance, higher education, FFL teaching/learning, learners' empowerment and plurilingualism, social representation, language teachers' professional development.

Santrauka. Per pastaruosius penkiasdešimt metų kalbos didaktika pasuko besimokančiojo-kalbančiojo autonomiškumo ir daugiakalbystės link. Šioje paradigmų kaitoje, kurią skatina Europos institucijos, kyla klausimas, kaip Europos universitetų prancūzų kaip užsienio kalbos dėstytojai vertina savo kaip piliečių ir būsimų prancūzų kalbos mokytojų rengėjų vaidmenį? Nuo ko priklauso besimokančiųjų kalbinės kompetencijos įgijimą skatinančios didaktikos įgyvendinimas? Kalbant apie Latvijos situaciją, ši šalis yra plėšoma tarp sovietinės praeities, Europos institucijų direktyvų ir etnocentristinių vertybių. Šiame straipsnyje pateikiami išsamaus kokybinio kalbos analizės tyrimo rezultatai. Pristatomi esminiai Latvijos universiteto prancūzų kaip užsienio kalbos dėstytojų pasisakymai apie užsienio kalbų didaktiką ir jų profesinę patirtį, tuo pat metu analizuojant oficialias nacionalines ir kitų šalių gaires kalbų didaktikos klausimais nuo 1980 m. Darbo pabaigoje pateikiamos išvados apie veiksnius, galinčius turėti įtakos prancūzų kaip užsienio kalbos didaktikos kūrimui Latvijoje, remiantis besimokančiojo įgalinimu ir daugiakalbyste. Pateikiami pasiūlymai prancūzų kaip užsienio kalbos ir kitų užsienio kalbų mokytojų rengimo plėtrai Latvijoje ir galbūt kitose Europos šalyse.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: Latvija, aukštasis mokslas, prancūzų kaip užsienio kalbos mokymas/mokymasis, besimokančiojo įgalinimas ir daugiakalbystė, socialinis atstovavimas, kalbų mokytojų profesinis tobulėjimas.

Introduction

During the last fifty years, foreign language methodology has evolved towards learner-speaker empowerment/autonomy and plurilingualism inside and outside the classroom. How could language teachers at University be encouraged to implement this kind of evolution in didactics, supported by the European institutions?

Working in Latvia and carrying out research into this subject in this country, it is now obvious to me that, to answer this question, it is necessary to take into account international, national and institutional contexts but also teachers' situation first. This could help to propose solutions for teachers' professional development towards empowering and plurilingual didactics.

In this paper, I will stand up for this statement using the example of the research I carried out in Latvia. Before setting out the research methodology I used, I will roughly recall European institutions' positioning on language learning and learner-speaker autonomy or empowerment, which is the basis of the problem discussed here. Afterwards, I will present elements from Latvian society and university contexts which do not facilitate the implementation of this European positioning. Then, I will go on in detail exploring how it impacts French language teaching charateristics at university level in Latvia. Finally, I will conclude with some proposals to enforce empowering and plurilingual language learning in Latvia and possibly in other countries.

Creating a new European citizenship through citizens' plurilingualism and empowerment?

Nowadays, European institutions promote a new supranational citizenship among their member states. One of the main tools for creating this new citizenship is a process of lifelong learning that can help people to develop some priority skills. These skills can be divided into three categories: basic skills, mediation skills and developed skills. Some of these three catgories' skills are related to language learning. Thus, the ability to communicate in different languages (a basic skill) can be complemented with the ability to learn to learn, the one to understand and analyse cultural facts and phenomena (mediation skills). This can lead to developed skills, for example, in politics, democratic life or entrepreneurship. People should then be able to participate in democratic debates, to create links and projects with foreigners. Developing language learning in Europe has then a major goal for European institutions: to expand linguistic diversity through multilingualism and plurilingualism in order to create this new supranational citizenship.

States, governments and people, citizens are directly concerned with this policy as they are also by what I call «the empowerment continuum», related to linguistic diversity. This continuum consists of three kinds of autonomy. Learning autonomy is for Holec (1985, p. 4) the ability to take charge of one's learning: determining the objectives, the contents, methods and techniques to be used,

monitoring learning rythm and self-evaluation. Language autonomy is, according to Germain and Netten (2004), the ability to take linguistic initiatives and to use spontaneously new statements during an authentic communicative situation. The third part of this continuum is the general autonomy. Hoffmans Gosset (2006, p. 15) defines it as the ability to choose between various values and opinion trends which are offered and adhere in a lucid way to some of these values to make them one's own. I consider, as the European institutions do, that learning autonomy leads to language autonomy. This autonomy can help people to construct their own autonomy in the European society.

This is a theoretical statement. But what about reality? Indeed, for each context, one can wonder if European positioning should and can be implemented by authorities, society and teachers and how it can be done. I carried out a research into this subject in Latvia which could be useful in trying to deal with this issue.

Taking into account social representations through speech analysis

In this research, I took into account higher education French language teachers' social representations of the learners-citizens autonomy/empowerment and multi-and plurilingualism. I tried to underscore links between external official discourse and the positioning of university teachers. I firstly took information from experts' interviews and papers and from official documents about university and language policies and learning in Latvia during and after soviet times. Afterwards, on the basis of the speech analysis considering eight interviews of French Language University teachers realised in February 2007, I made a qualitative analysis of this social group representation of themselves in Latvian context, of language and language learning and of their relationships with students.

My research methodology was based on the elements of the SPEAKING model that Hymes (1974, p. 53-62) designed to analyse communicative-enunciative situations. To supplement this model, I analysed the appearance of subjects and linking between these subjects in each interview so that I could specify the elements that Hymes considers to be acts and keys in communicative-enunciative situations. Furthermore, in each interview, I took into account how teachers used deictic words as pronouns « tu », « nous » et « on »: thanks to these pronouns, the speaker shows his own positioning towards others. I made also the analysis of the use of time adverbs, of proper nouns designating persons, and of words referring to places (cities, universities, states…).

Thus, I identified central and peripheral components of the French language university teachers' representation. According to Moliner, Rateau, Cohen-Scali discussing about Abric's work (2002, p. 22-23), central components, which refer to norms, values, interests of a group, are expressed in consensual discourses. Then, considering that central components would appear more frequently in discourses than other components, I counted elements that I identified in each interviews.

Moreover, to develop a qualitative analysis, I tried to pick out in these discourses contradictions and coherences between components. Thus, I identified the ones that were well accepted and stood up by most of the speakers and which were part of the central part of the teacher's representation.

Here are the more signifying results of the work I carried out during 5 years, and which are detailed in a Ph.D thesis (Durandin, 2011), about autonomy/empowerment and plurilingualism in Latvia, in higher education system in this country and, finally, in French language classes in Latvia's universities.

Plurilingualism and autonomy/empowerment in Latvia's macro context

During the Soviet times in Latvia, a policy based on bilingualism and on immigration favoured Russian language speakers. Russian language was then the official language, used in universities in prestigious and useful matters for the USSR (astronautics, mathematics and economics, for example). Russian ethnic speakers were more and more numerous and influential. According to Dreifelds (1996, p. 157), in 1989 in Latvia, 81 % of the inhabitants were able to speak Russian but 62 % could speak Latvian.

In this context, Latvian speakers defended their language by using it in cultural productions (songs, poetry) and in some universities (Art, Music, Agriculture Academies, for instance). Between 1989 and 1992, Latvian ethnical part of the society succeeded in imposing an official State bilingualism and a Latvian language defence policy. The 1992 law on languages declared that one of the essential requirements for the existence, protection and development of the Latvian unity is Latvian language. It became then the only official and administration language. However, Russian language remained very influential in economics and daily life. Here is a very impressive example of this situation: in 2000, even if Latvian language could be spoken by 60 % of the inhabitants, people who were able to speak Russian represented more than 90 % of the population (Valsts valodas komisija, 2002, p. 29).

In this situation, concepts of plurilingualism and multilingualism were and are often borrowed by politicians to defend one language against the other one and to continue to separate both languages and communities. Russian ethnic politicians use them to try to make recognise Russian language as an official language. Latvian ethnic governments impose Latvian in schooling (even in minority and private schooling) to help Russian language speakers' « integration » and to promote the so-called « multilingual society ».

This has led to a situation where state monolingualism leanings are moving away from the reality of a multilingual society. Latvian language benefits from laws (in all domains) that allow it assume its status and prevent or limit the use of other languages in public sphere. The use, the defence, the form of Latvian are developed thanks to a system of institutions dedicated to laws implementation control and support. Generally, legislation considers minority languages as foreign

languages which are neglected, as even Liv and Latgalian, two historical national languages of Latvia. Russian, which is spoken by a large part of inhabitants in some areas and in Riga, is officially shown as a foreign language. Moreover, the language market rules put Russian language in competition with other foreign languages: English and German.

This policy is paradoxical: in the name of plurilingualism, it is monolingualism in favour of Latvian which is promoted. Surely, it is so because the linguistic reality has not changed: Latvian is more and more used by all the population but Russian language speakers are still in a linguistic self-sufficient situation. Besides, various communities have schools and some religious events can happen in their languages, they have modern medias but also paper ones and can spread information in their languages.

Let's move on now to the second main issue of this paper: autonomy/empowering. Is this concept in use in Latvia? To answer such a question, one can notice that citizens are still not empowered in Latvia. There exists a system which respects pluralistic elective democracy but the daily democratic practice is rare. Associations have no real influence on social debates and most people act separately, for their own interests, rather than in common. Moreover, the society which is more or less divided between Latvian language speakers and Russian language speakers is built up on economic issues, on a market society model more than on a civic society model.

Nevertheless, a new kind of citizenship appears, based on the concept of person and unity among citizens. Thus, the two former presidents of Latvia, Vaira Vike Freiberga and Valdis Zatlers, sometimes insisted on the unity of values and actions among all citizens to build a modern Latvian society. In society life, some citizens' movements have appeared to open the debate on democracy practice recently (Melbiksis, 2009).

Finally, people's autonomy/empowerment is not really present in the Latvian society at the moment but it begins to rise up. Plurilingualism and multilingualism are real facts in the Latvian society but governments, in reaction to what happened during the Soviet occupation, want to use these concepts to make Latvian language stronger against Russian without having interest in other languages. Let's continue by considering autonomy/empowerment and plurilingualism in the university mesocontext in Latvia.

Students' plurilingualism and empowerment in the university mesocontext

Language learning is officially declared as a priority in higher education system because it helps students' mobility (foreigners coming to Latvia and Latvian going study abroad) and, then, quality rising. However, one can doubt this declaration for three reasons. Firstly, officially, only Latvian can be used in non linguistic courses

at University. It is difficult for foreign teachers to come and work in Latvian higher education institutions without proving their knowledge of Latvian. Secondly, most of the interviews I had with experts in 2007 (Durandin, 2011) proved that language learning system works like a liberal market. In this market, only one foreign language is dominant and very much in demand: English. Other languages can rarely be chosen by students, especially because language learning is usually an optional subject that can give credit points during no more than one or two semesters. This leads us to the third reason: words without action. If languages are given a priority why they still are optional subjects, why we cannot use them in teaching non linguistic speciality subjects? Finally, I conclude that University system gives priority to Latvian language and the second one to English as the only useful foreign language. Plurilingualism is not promoted.

What about language learners' autonomy at Latvian University level? Learners' autonomy implementation depends on two concepts: andragogy, which is, according to Knowles (1974, p. 37), the art and science of helping adults learn, and learning process which is in opposition to the teaching process. In both cases, the teacher has to help the learner to achieve his goals, he has to prepare and facilitate the learning process, but he is no more the leader of this process, whose development is decided by learner characteristics, needs and wills.

In 1980's, the evolution towards these two concepts could be noticed in the speeches of the soviet experts and in official speeches of those who wanted to follow language learning evolution in the Western countries. However, during this period, teachers in the USSR and in Latvia did not change the way they worked with students: they led all the education process (Durandin, 2011, p. 199-204). In 1990's, the institutional laissez-faire policy, due to a lack of money and, mainly, of strategy for the university allowed teachers to work in the way they wanted or as they could, that is to say as they used to before. Nollendorfs, a Latvian teacher of German philology who came from the USA to work for the University of Latvia at this time, wrote some interesting papers about this situation (Nollendorfs, 1991 and 1992). During the last ten years, situation has not changed significantly except that teachers formally borrow parts of the « modern lexicon or practice » (for details see Kačkere, 2003, and Rimsane, 2008).

A modernised philology in the classroom microcontext

To formally follow European guidelines and the slow development of Latvian society and institutions to multilingualism/plurilingualism and autonomy/empowerment, French language teachers at university, as other languages teachers, created « a modernised philology » (Durandin, 2011, p. 321-394). On the basis of the analysis of their interviews, I can describe the main characteristic of the philology that university French language teachers' social group has created through the last twenty years.

In this philology, one of the main concepts of communicative language learning - work on communicative situations - is completely neglected by teachers. Actually, it is most important for them to work on linguistic aspects, and on linguistic and cultural knowledge rather than on communicative skills or culture analysis skills. However, teachers emphasise oral skills by offering an opportunity for students to discuss and to make exercises orally. Even if teachers incite students to work on different kinds of texts, most of the time is spent on sharing lexical or grammatical information. The goal is not to work on text specificities to be able to produce them. One of the most important aspects of this modernised philology is the use of «modern media», that is to say, new books, CDs, CD-ROMs from nowadays publishers or also Internet, mainly with Google. This helps information gathering. Teachers can encourage students' plurilingualism by allowing or asking them to find information in different languages outside the classroom. However, there is no active use of this plurilingualism, for example, even by comparing language systems or by discussing the ways one can learn languages. Finally, this new philology is not based on learners' needs concerning communicative situations and on their language use but mostly on knowledge that is pointed out by teachers.

In the context of this modernised philology, one of teachers' main concerns, which appears in all the interviews, is to motivate learners. This could be understood like a way to take into account students's needs and practice and to help them develop autonomy. Teachers' discourse proves that this is not the case: for all of them, teacher has the main role in the classroom. All activities are provided by him/her to all students who are considered like one entity whose parts have the same needs, the same expectations (if any), and the same characteristics. According to the teachers in their interviews, there are three means to motivate learners:

- to please students by offering them to work on subject and on documents, medias that they like (but which are not always relevant to their learning);
- to try to understand their charateristics, their learning styles to help them to get self-confidence;
- to give challenges, exercises and tasks where their knowledge (or sometimes their skills) will be used and evaluated as, for example, making a presentation of one particular cultural point, writing a text about one particular theme.

Most of the time, teachers motivate learners by pleasing them and giving them challenges. This didactics is clearly not empowering, learners are not autonomous and cannot become autonomous. Teachers keep control of their courses too strongly.

How can one facilitate teachers' professional development?

As for me, this didactics is due to the fact that, in their interviews and in their social representation, FFL teachers at university level define themselves, first,

as practitioners and not as theorists or social actors. They have no interest in defining the teacher's role and status in society to create a plurilingual citizenship. It is probably because they are on the fringe of society: their status and influence on society are low. Moreover, they define themselves not much in reference to language policy and theory in didactics. To earn enough money, they need to be neutral and they do not have time for reflection on theorical issues. They have to use what is quickly effective and does not challenge their action with students deeply. That is the reason why the core of their social representation of themselves is directly built on their practice and experience as teachers: tools, media, techniques which are useful for making students learn effectively.

Actually, teachers cut themselves from ideological or theoretical issues because they consider those to be not relevant. They prefer to concentrate on what ensures their status and salary, that is to say, their job in the classroom where they are leaders, and on what they really own, which is steady, known and accepted by others, their experience and practice.

That is why I propose to make them work on their representations for giving them the opportunity of a professional development to become reflective practicioners. In this way, they should concentrate on themselves at first before accepting an opening to different contexts and persons they are in contact with. Thus, they could implement an empowering and plurilingual didactics when they consider it should be done and by purpose.

To reach this point, one could work on what is very important for teachers, the practical side of their job by sharing experience and working on case studies, if possible, with teachers from other countries. This should be complemented with studies on linguistics and didactics. Then, to make this continuous education effective in the classroom one could offer teachers to work on pedagogical projects where each one has to participate in a team job. All this is really impossible to realise without a political and an institutional support, in words and in action.

To support does not mean to impose. This education should not be designed by education experts only but also by empowered teachers themselves, who are aware of their action in political, social and educational situations. Are politicians and higher education institutions' leaders ready for it … everywhere in Europe?

References

Dreifelds, J. (1996). *Latvia in Transition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Durandin, J. (2011). *Vers l'autonomisation des apprenants en français langue étrangère à l'université en Lettonie?* Thèse de doctorat, Sciences du langage: Université de Franche-Comté.

Germain, C., & Netten, J. (2004, December). Facteurs de développement de l'autonomie langagière en FLE/FLS. *Apprentissage des langues et systèmes d'information et de communication (ALSIC)*, 7(1), 55-69. Retrieved from http://alsic.u-strasbg.fr/v07/germain/alsic_v07_08-rec2.htm.

Hoffmans-Gosset, M.-A. (2006). *Apprendre l'autonomie, Apprendre la socialisation* (5th ed.). Lyon: Chronique Sociale.

Holec, H. (1985). *Autonomie et apprentissage des langues étrangères*. Strasbourg: Conseil de l'Europe.

Hymes, D. (1974). *Foundations in Sociolinguistics*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsyl-vania Press.

Kackere, A. (2003). Language Learning and Teaching in Latvia. In D. Newby *Mediating between theory and practice in the context of different learning cultures and lan-guages* (pp. 103-106). European Centre for Modern Languages, Council of Europe. Retrieved from http://archive.ecml.at/documents/pub124E2003.pdf

Knowles, M. S. (1974). *The modern practice of adult education, andragogy versus pedagogy* (5th ed.). New York: Association Press.

Melbiksis, D. (2009). Lettonie: la démocratie en désordre. *Regard sur l'est*. Retrieved from http://www.regard-est.com/home/breve.

Moliner, P., Rateau, P., & Cohen-Scali, V. (2002). *Les représentations sociales: Pratique des études de terrain*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

Nollendorfs, V. (1992, December). Restoring the core: Democratization through educa-tion in post-communist Europe. *Association of the advancement of Baltic states studies NEWSLETTER*, *64*, 77-81.

Nollendorfs, V. (1991). Teaching Language and Literature in Latvia: The Return of a Native as a Fullbright. *Profession, 91*, 15-21.

Rimsane, I. (2008, July). *Main trends in foreign languages teacher education in Latvia and Europe.* Retrieved from http://www.pef.uni-lj.si/tepe2008/papers/Rimsane.pdf.

Valsts valodas komisija. (2002, March). Latviešu valodas attīstības valsts programma, programmas koncepcija. *Valsts valoda: Latviešu valoda*. Retrieved from http://www.vvk.lv/doc_upl/VVKkoncepcija.doc?PHPSESSID=4045df989c1d5ddb8cce5470e8d85b8b.

Jonathan DURANDIN **Docteur en Sciences du langage**	**Jonathan DURANDIN** **Kalbos mokslų daktaras**
Domaines de recherche: politiques linguistiques éducatives, didactique du FLE et des langues étrangères, plurilinguisme et multilinguisme, autonomisation des apprenants-locuteurs, formation de formateurs en langues étrangères	*Mokslinių interesų sritys:* kalbų mokymo politika, užsienio kalbų ir prancūzų kaip užsienio kalbos mokymas, daugiakalbystė ir daugiakalbės kompetencijos plėtojimas, prancūzų kalbos specialistų kvalifikacijos kėlimas
Maître de conférences at Latvijas Kulturas Akademija	Docentas, Latvijos kultūros akademija
Avotu 8-43, Riga, LV-1011, Lettonie	Avotu 8-43, Ryga, LV-1011, Latvija
jonathan.durandin@bluemail.ch	jonathan.durandin@bluemail.ch