Bridging teaching, learning, and assessment processes through a reflective method:
Implications for plurilingual learning environments

Barbara Spinelli
bs2165@columbia.edu
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Abstract

The challenges of global education highlight the need for students to meaningfully engage with their life experiences, deepen their reflection on their practices and feelings, and learn from them. What challenges may the implementation of such reflective approaches in a plurilingual and pluricultural learning environment entail? This article has a three-fold aim: first, it explores benefits that reflective and participatory methods have brought to plurilingual learners in different learning settings; second it describes the implementation of a three-mode reflective framework in a university blended course aimed at developing plurilingual competences, strategies, and literacies; and third, it argues how such reflective methods may contribute to promoting an integrated and transformative learning experience for a diverse linguistic and cultural learning community.

Key words: reflective approach, plurilingualism, plurilingual/pluricultural learning

Résumé

Les défis de l'éducation à la citoyenneté mondiale mettent en évidence la nécessité pour les étudiants de s'impliquer de manière significative dans leurs expériences de vie, d'approfondir leur réflexion sur leurs pratiques et leurs sentiments, et d'en tirer des enseignements. Quels défis la mise en oeuvre de telles approches réflexives dans un environnement d'apprentissage plurilingue et pluriculturel peut-elle comporter ? L'objectif de cet article est triple : d'abord, on y explorera les avantages que des méthodes réflexives et participatives ont apportés aux apprenants plurilingues dans différents contextes d'apprentissage ; deuxièmement, on y décrira la mise en oeuvre d'un cadre de réflexion à trois modes dans un cours universitaire hybride visant à développer les compétences, stratégies et littératies plurilingues ; et troisièmement, on y expliquera comment de telles méthodes de réflexion peuvent contribuer à promouvoir une expérience d'apprentissage intégrée et transformatrice pour une communauté d'apprentissage linguistique et culturelle diversifiée.

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Mots-clés : approche réflexive, plurilinguisme, apprentissage plurilingue/ pluriculturel

Introduction

The increasingly globalized and multilingual world has brought about new challenges for language education and language teaching and learning. Global challenges necessitate the capacity to deal with a wide range of textual genres, multiple linguistic and semiotic resources, and a variety of different communicative channels. In language teaching and learning, this capacity is no longer limited to the traditional notion of 'communicative competence', which implies the development of linguistic and pragmatic knowledge and skills (Leung, 2014). Scholars in applied linguistics talk about *pedagogy multiliteracies* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2008, 2009; New London Group, 1996, 2000), *multilingual literacies* (Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000), *pluriliteracies practices* (García & Flores, 2013; García, Bartlett, and Kleifgen, 2007) emphasizing the need to develop multiple ways to combine different communicative codes, semiotic resources, and plural literacies, including interpretative and critical literacies. In the wider field of education, these principles are mirrored in the core values of the 'holistic approach' to learning (Miller, 2000; Nakagava, 2000; Forbes, 2003; Shriner, Banev, & Oxley, 2005). These values focus on the idea that learning should:

- connect the person to the world and, therefore, should start from his or her life experiences, feelings, ideas
- recognize learners' inquisitive minds and promote critical thinking and creative skills
- embrace diversity and focus on egalitarian and democratic relationships

In plurilingual instructional settings, these principles are of extreme importance at two different levels:

- at the micro-level, since an individual's previous existential knowledge and practices underpin any further progress in learning and identity construction
- at the macro-level, because, in a collaborative learning community, learners may be able to promote co-learning by sharing their plurilingual/pluricultural resources and developing linguistic diversity awareness.

Possible implementations of such values in plurilingual teaching/learning contexts call for reflective practices whose outcomes may include reflection on: the plurality of learners' linguistic and cultural repertoires; the process of

learning and identity construction, and the emotions and feelings associated with this process.

The purpose of this article is to examine the role that such reflective activities play in linking teaching, learning, and assessment processes in multilingual classrooms. The article is divided in three sections. The first section reviews research on the impact that a reflective and participatory method has on both learning and assessment, with a focus on how learners may benefit as subjects of these processes. The second section describes the implementation of this method in an Intensive Elementary Italian course offered by a US university, where a pluralistic pedagogy has been adopted.[1] Finally, learners' reflective outcomes are discussed with reference to a three-mode reflective framework (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Hegarty, 2011) in order to show how a reflective approach may holistically intertwine all the processes involved in a plurilingual learning experience.

Creative, active and reflective practices: The transformative dimensions of plurilingual learning

Over the last decade, many scholars have highlighted the positive impact that participatory methods, which promote learners' cognitive engagement and identity investment, have on plurilingual learning from the very first stages of students' education (Allen & Paesani, 2010; Beacco, Byram, Cuenant, & Panthier, 2010; Castellotti & Moore, 2009; Cope & Gollings, 2001; Coste & Simon, 2009; Cummins, 2009; Little, 2009a, 2011; Melo-Pfeifer, 2017; Prasad, 2013). These researchers pointed out the importance of involving learners' view and understanding of plurilingualism in the learning process, and encouraging them to reflect upon the value of their pluri-competences and literacies. Multilingual classrooms are micro-ecosystems characterized by specific plurilingual profiles that may vary according to the different combinations of their participants' linguistic repertoires. In fact, García and Sylvan (2011) define plurilingual instruction as "dynamically centered on the singularity of the individual experiences that make up a plurality" (p. 391). Such rich contexts provide many opportunities for learning collective acts and co-construction of meanings (Wei, 2014), particularly when reflective practices

[1] In Europe, "pluralistic approaches" (Candelier et al., 2010) to teaching have been developed in order to involve the use of several varieties of languages and cultures and foster students' plurilingual competence. These approaches have been implemented in language teaching in contrast to monolingual approaches that are linked to the idea of language separation and inhibit the possibilities of multiple languages use. This main concept is also shared by the Translanguaging approach to language pedagogy (García & Kleyn, 2016) developed in North America to value students' linguistic diversity through the use of more dynamic language practices.

are both shared, moving from the *local* (individual level) to the *central* (class level) process of reflection, and empowered through the support of digital environments (Spinelli, 2015a, 2015b).

Reflective practices may also link teaching, learning, and assessment if they represent the center of the learning process, and hence "transform" learners' classroom experience and improve their autonomy (Little, 2009b, p. 4) and self-efficacy (Gredler, 2001, p. 327). De facto, assessment should be integral to the teaching and learning processes (Chappuis, 2005; McNamee & Chen, 2005). When assessment is part of learning and learners can take ownership of this process, they are able to take in assessment feedback, interpret it, and connect it to their existing knowledge, experiences, and beliefs (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Shepard, 2008; Stiggins, 2008). This is a crucial aspect that needs to be taken into account in plurilingual learning contexts given the linguistic and cultural capital plurilingual speakers can bring into the classroom to enrich their dialogue and meaning-making processes.

Learners can also benefit from such active participation when they are directly engaged in the production of learning materials, which involve their critical and reflective thinking. For instance, they can create texts using their imaginative and multimodal resources to represent their perception of plurilingualism and plurilingual literacy practices (Spinelli, 2015a; Castellotti & Moore, 2009; Cummings, 2009; Melo-Pfeifer, 2017; Moore & Castellotti, 2011; Prasad, 2013). Learning *processes* and *products* are, then, interlinked through students' creative work and performances. In this way, they can play the role of co-researchers and be actively engaged in the data generation process. As Prasad (2013) pointed out, students' agency in data generation enhances their "creative processes, reflection and engagement in the inquiry" (p. 9) and leads to a paradigm shift in the research method, making it more dynamic and collaborative.

In order to raise students' awareness of plurilingual learning processes and develop their critical thinking skills, an integrated curriculum was designed for an accelerated elementary Italian university course, as described below.

A student-led project to promote integrative plurilingual learning

Instructional setting and course design

The project discussed in this article was conducted in an Intensive Italian Elementary course offered in Fall 2014 at a U.S. university. The prerequisite to register for this course was knowledge of at least one other Romance language, or previous exposure to the Italian language. The class met three days a week (one hour and 50 minutes per day) for fourteen weeks. This project allowed the collection of data for an ongoing longitudinal research study that origi-

nally started in 2013 (Spinelli, 2015a), which aims at exploring links between plurilingual pedagogical practices and students' achievement.

The main goal of the classroom project was to engage students in the creation of a plurilingual online space where they were asked to build multilingual and multimodal learning materials (e.g. multilingual dialogues, multilingual vocabulary resources, cross-linguistic tables for grammar comparisons, multiple visual representations of cultural values and practices) and develop critical thinking activities through individual and collective modalities (e.g., exploring and discussing linguistic and cultural proximity and distances across languages, sharing reading and plurilingual strategies adopted to tackle reading in different languages). These online plurilingual activities[2] were integrated into a more traditional syllabus[3] according to the theme, lexical area, and grammatical structures introduced each week (Spinelli, 2015a).

The language objectives of this blended course (lexical items, grammatical items and genres) were selected according to the taxonomy for the Italian language of the *Profilo della lingua italiana* (Spinelli & Parizzi, 2010). The course was designed in order to develop students' communicative language competence at the Common European Framework on Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) A2+ level. Plurilingual objectives (e.g., recognizing a word in the written form of unfamiliar languages on the basis of familiar languages; using knowledge and skills already mastered in one language in activities of comprehension in another language) were identified through the Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures (FREPA) descriptors (Candelier et al., 2010).

By taking into consideration the social dimension of learning (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1997) classroom and online activities mainly involved collaborative work (i.e peer-learning; peer-editing, peer-scaffolding) and shared reflection practices.

Participants

Fourteen students participated in the project, nine female and five male, between the ages of 17 and 28. There were twelve undergraduate and two grad-

[2]An example of these activities is the following: since the topic of the unit studied in week three was "routine activities", students were asked to create an online multilingual and multimodal dictionary related to that lexical area. Afterwards, they were asked to collaboratively explore orthographic correspondences across languages.

[3]"Traditional syllabus" denotes a curriculum aimed at developing the communicative target language (Italian) competence. However, the course was re-designed and developed in a blended course format that included online plurilingual activities and practices (see Spinelli, 2015a).

uate students. Their plurilingual repertoires comprised between two and seven languages (L1: English, French, Spanish, and German; L2/L3/L_n: German, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian, Hebrew, Arabic, Chinese, Irish, and Italian).

Data generation and collection

As already indicated, inviting students to create multimodal artefacts and reflection materials as part of the research process allows them to "engage ... their brain in a different way" (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006, p. 84). In this project, students' involvement in the data generation process was promoted by the understanding that they are the best "interpreters" of their linguistic and cultural experiences, and are capable of recapturing them, thinking about them, and evaluating them.

Reflective activities were, therefore, designed to complement pedagogical and assessment tasks. The 'three-mode reflective framework' adopted in this study was based on a revisited version of Hegarty's (2011) model and developed to enhance three main different types of reflection:

descriptive reflection: allows students to describe events providing explanations or justifications, and express feelings and emotions relating to it

dialogic reflection: involves higher thinking processes such as exploring experiences, events, actions, making judgments, hypothesizing, and explaining

critical reflection: leads to transformative learning through self-awareness and reflection on what is learned from the experience and how this change will affect future practices

In contrast to the original model (Hegarty, 2011), the framework conceived for this study is not always hierarchical and sequential, as it allows students to either combine or separately develop the different types of reflection according to the reflective practice design and learning goals.

The framework was then adopted to facilitate different reflective processes such as noticing similarities and differences between linguistic and cultural systems, describing and interpreting or analyzing the plurilingual-pluricultural experiences, examining peer perspectives, and learning from the experience in order to make changes to plurilingual practices. These processes were encouraged by means of reflective activities and prompts in different stages of the learning pathway, as described in Table 1.

As mentioned earlier, in addition to students' artefacts and reflection materials, data were collected through self-assessment and self-evaluation surveys

Table 1

Reflective method design for instruction

Type of reflection	Reflective activity(ies)	Reflective process(es)	Learning goals
Descriptive	my plurilingual self-portrait (online)	– describing emotional responses to multilingual/multicultural experiences through metaphors	– familiarizing with *oneself's* (student) and *collective* (class) plurilingual identity
Descriptive and dialogic	biographical information exchange (online)	– exploring similarities and differences of linguistic expressions used to carry out communicative functions (e.g., greeting, providing/receiving information) in multilingual dialogues	– promoting plurilingual awareness and skills
	my home/my family/my daily life multilingual vocabulary (online and classroom)	– describing these themes through words and short descriptive passages in multiple languages – exploring lexical, syntactic, and cultural proximity and distance	– raising cross-linguistic and cross-cultural awareness – developing plurilingual competences
Descriptive, dialogic, and critical	talking about the past (online and classroom)	– exploring relations between form (past tenses) and meaning (use) across languages of individual/collective plurilingual repertoires	– developing individual/collective plurilingual competence and strategies – promoting peer-scaffolding
	reading in more than one language — intercomprehension (at home and online)	– describing reading and plurilingual strategies adopted while reading texts in different languages – analyzing peers' strategies (similarities and differences)	– developing plurilingual reading strategies – promoting collaborative learning

and a classroom discussion focused on factors that affected students' performances in examination.[4] The latter, in particular, was related to a midterm exam, which is a university requirement half-way through the course. The exam covered half of the curricular syllabus and included reading and writing tests. These tests were designed to:

- collect quantitative data on the level of Italian language proficiency students were able to achieve halfway through the semester
- explore the impact that plurilingual activities might have on the development of these two skills, particularly on reading skill.[5]

For this purpose, in particular, a post-reading questionnaire was submitted immediately after the test in order to encourage students to reflect on the difficulties they encountered when dealing with readings and the impact that the plurilingual pedagogy had on the strategies they adopted to answer the reading test questions.[6]

Two self-assessment and self-evaluation questionnaires were also submitted at the beginning and at the end of the course. They respectively included a section aimed at raising awareness of individual plurilingual repertoires and promoting students' reflection on the development of their plurilingual skills. All of these reflective practices activated cognitive and affective processes that involved the three dimensions of the reflective model described above, as shown in Table 2.

Findings and discussion

This section, drawing on data generated by students through reflective materials and collected by means of the self-assessment and self-evaluation questionnaires, and the audio-recorded classroom discussion, will provide some examples of the three-mode reflective framework described above for both teaching/learning and assessment. It will analyze the impact that such a reflective model has had on students' understanding of the use of their linguistic repertoire and perception of the plurilingual self by facilitating a holistic learning experience.

One of the preliminary reflective activities proposed to students is titled "My plurilingual self-portrait" and focused on descriptive reflection. The aim

[4]For this study, qualitative and quantitative data were collected through different tools. For a complete overview of the instruments used, see Spinelli (2017).

[5]For a more comprehensive description of the reading test design and procedures, see Spinelli (2017).

[6]The data collected through the post-reading test were analyzed after the midterm test was marked.

Table 2

Reflective method design for assessment and evaluation

Type of reflection	Reflective activity(ies)	Reflective process(es)	Learning goals
Descriptive	initial self-assessment and self-evaluation questionnaire (section one) (at home)	– providing factual information and reporting plurilingual experiences (e.g., at home, school, study-abroad programs)	– recalling plurilingual experiences
Descriptive and dialogic	initial self-assessment and self-evaluation questionnaire (section two) (at home)	– assessing one's own language proficiency in multiple languages – evaluating one's own plurilingual skills through FREPA descriptors at the preliminary stage	– promoting plurilingual awareness
	post-reading test questionnaire (at home)	– describing reading and plurilingual strategies adopted during the reading test – describing difficulties encountered while dealing with different reading texts – evaluating the impact of plurilingual activities on one' own performance in the reading test	– raising awareness of the impact of plurilingual pedagogy on personal achievement – linking plurilingual pedagogy and language proficiency assessment
Descriptive, dialogic, and critical	classroom discussion on midterm exam (classroom)	– discussing the reading test construct (e.g., type of readings and test items) –Analyzing factors that affected students' performances	– learning from the one's own and peers' reading test experience – developing plurilingual skills and strategies
	final self-assessment and self-evaluation questionnaire (sections two and four) (at home)	– focusing on possible progress of one's own plurilingual skills through FREPA descriptors – identifying what was learnt from the plurilingual learning experience	– developing self-awareness of changes in understanding the plurilingual self, skills, strategies, and beliefs

of this activity was, in fact, to encourage students to reflect upon their pluribiography describing, through metaphors and symbols, the affective connections to their multiple language and cultural experiences. They were asked to associate the different languages and cultures with parts of their body and creatively represent them in a self-portrait. During this meaning-making process, students were able to describe the role and functions that the languages and cultures in their linguistic repertoires play in their lives and the different values and emotional impact they associate with each of them.

A variety of similar activities have been adopted for this purpose, particularly with young pupils, (Busch, 2010; Molinié, 2009; Moore & Castellotti, 2011; Prasad, 2013, 2014) using various biographical tools (e.g., colours, videos, drawings, digital pictures, memoir writing). In this specific context, the activity was proposed to adult learners who could describe their lived experiences and feelings through interpretative narratives shared with peers in an "online storytelling space" (Spinelli, 2015a, p. 115). This shared space allowed students to become aware of how they internally negotiate their plural identity and how plurilingual and pluricultural competence is both highly subjective and dependent on individual life trajectories and personal histories (Prasad, 2014, p. 71). Their narratives show the complex, sometimes conflicting, nature of their plural self and its hierarchical structure, as shown in the following extracts:[7]

S1 German: I suppose I would relate this language with my head simply as it was a language that I learned as a child. I have an emotional connection to it that is *deeper than any other second language* that I have ever studied. *It feels more authentically part of me than other languages*.

S2 English is my native tongue, so I would associate it with my brain. It is a *necessary, logical, rational means of communicating* ...

S3 Je ne sais pas trop lier les langues à des parties du corps, donc, si c'est permis, je préfère tout simplement essayer de faire quelques remarques sur les langues que je connais ... Le français: la langue *de ma mère* et *de mon enfance*; à la fois la langue de la littérature enfantine ... Le turc: la langue de mon père. Une langue étrange ... mais très mélodique. *Je regrette toujours de ne l'avoir pas apprise ... L'anglais: mon autre langue maternelle*: pas au sens propre, mais je l'appelle ainsi, parce que je pense au moins aussi souvent en anglais qu'en français. *La langue de presque toute ma scolarité.*

S4 I associate Spanish with my heart. It is my mother tongue and so when I speak it I don't ever truly have to be thinking ... *it has more weight* than when I do in other languages because I've spoken it my entire life.

According to the students' voices, it seems that, among the languages they

[7]Italics are used to indicate emphasis added by the author in all participant data included in this article.

know, the dominant role is mostly played by their mother tongue. However, the development of the plurilingual identity is a life-long process (CoE, 2001, p. 5), which is characterized by a chronological and emotional dimension (Spinelli, 2015a, p. 116). In this lifelong trajectory, the role of the "dominant language" may vary according to the individual's needs, and emotional and affective involvement may play a crucial role and affect the hierarchical dimension of the linguistic repertoire (Jessner, 2013, p. 1), as the following student highlights:

> *S5* I would associate English, my native tongue, with my head … It is the language that I use to naturally process information, write, and think … *But I feel somewhat detached from English emotionally because I've often considered it as a necessary function*, while the study of other language has been a conscious choice. French is my heart. I grew up in the French-speaking part of Switzerland and fell in love with the language — and *I was heartbroken* when my family returned to the US, and French was no longer a part of my everyday life. It's the language that I speak with my sister and old friends; *it always feels like home to speak.*

As this student's data suggest, the concept of dominance could be affected by the emotional power and significance which individuals link to the multiple languages they know. Pavlenko (2002) argues that the association of positive emotional attachment to the first language and detachment from additional languages, generally described in order to define the psychological distance between the first and second language of bilinguals, is too simplistic and cannot explain the complex nature of plurilingual identities. One of the examples she provides is the narrative of a Mexican–American writer, Richard Rodriguez, who points out that emotional intensity or intimacy "is not created by a particular language; it is created by intimates" (Rodriguez, 1982, pp. 31–32). This perception emerged in several students' narratives, as follows:

> *S2* I associate Italian with my heart and my ears as it is *the language spoken by my family* and I have heard it at *home since childhood* but never actually learned it. It is the language of *my grandmother, my mother and my aunts* always speak it to her. It is *the language of "home"*, very musical and warm.
>
> *S6* I would associate Italian with my heart … I believe it is *an essential part of my family* and it's background and being able to learn it would be an honour.
>
> *S7* Gaelic is my heart. It is a complex language … Though the language seems so counterintuitive for students of Romance languages *this language came extraordinarily* easy to me, perhaps because it was *spoken for centuries by my father's Irish ancestors and mother's Scottish ancestors* before I returned to speak it years later.
>
> *S8* Hebrew would probably be my toes … I'm not really aware of my knowledge of that alphabet anymore (although it's thankfully still there) … But at the same time, it has always been a *part of my life* and will hopefully always be there, and *it's how I associate myself … with my religious background.*

The expressive and connotative power that students connect to different languages of their repertoires also plays a fundamental role in their preferences and use. The multiple linguistic resources they possess represent "different vantage points from which to evaluate and interpret their own and others' emotional experiences" (Pavlenko, 2008, p. 150). Students describe their preferences in the following way:

S1 I also find German wildly expressive. There are words in German that just get *straight to the essence of things*, which I just love.

S3 Langue riche [English] par son absorption du vocabulaire des autres langues. Langue un peu sèche, elle n'exprime pas toujours bien les émotions, ou emploie un registre qui semble la trahir pour le faire ... L'allemand ... Langue logique et structurée, mais aussi très flexible et surtout *très expressive par ses mots composés*. En traduisant quelque chose de l'allemand, *je dois souvent totalement reformuler*, sentiment que je n'ai pas quand je traduis entre l'anglais et le français.

S7 I believe English to be one of the world's most beautiful languages. Perhaps it is Anglocentric of me to say that, but as an author and multilingual/macaronic poet, I know that *English has one of the most extensive lexicons of synonyms* ...

Such emotional and expressive nature of languages is what "is taken for granted by monolingual speakers but ... puzzle and delight bi- and multilinguals" (Pavlenko, 2005, p. 158).

The introductory reflective activity described earlier was crucial for students to raise awareness of these plural resources and the capacity they have to analyze and interrelate multiple languages. The sharing of personal histories was, in fact, a pivotal starting point for understanding individual and collective plurilingual competences and building a trustworthy co-(plurilingual) learning community.

An example of how this plurilingual community may benefit from individual plurilingual competence is provided by a pedagogical and reflective activity proposed during the first week of the course to promote descriptive and dialogic reflection. Students were divided into groups according to the languages of their linguistic repertoire and asked to create multilingual dialogues and to exchange biographical information (e.g., name, age, profession), with each participant using a different language. This pedagogical activity asked students to produce an animated video that involved collaborative writing, recording and editing. During the following reflective activity, they were asked to fill out a comparative online table focusing on the similarities and differences of interrogative expressions across languages and look for links with their Latin root words.

Students shared their insights in an online discussion forum providing ex-

amples, making hypotheses, and co-constructing meanings using their plurilingual resources and background knowledge. They made sense of interlinguistic relationships and influences across languages through their personal plurilingual competence, discipline-specific and general knowledge, and new strategies, as shown in the following exchanges:

> *S10* I was also not particularly surprised by this activity since, as Romance languages, they all come from the same root … such as tutti, tout, todo, and tudo … *although it was interesting to see this laid out explicitly on a table that allowed for quick and direct comparison* …

They were also able to foster interpretative literacy by becoming an "authorized explorer" and a "co-constructer" of knowledge (Wei, 2014, p. 168):

> *S2* Interestingly, each of the Romance languages (Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese) is closer to Latin in different words: sometimes it is Portuguese or Italian, sometimes Spanish or French. Some English words as well derive from Latin (*I imagine that* the pronoun "I" comes from the latin "ego" that gives "Io" "Je" "yo") … The same can be seen in "mi chiamo" where the "ch" sound of the Italian becomes the "J" ("ll") sound of the Spanish ("me llamo").
>
> *S3* As everyone has said, it is not surprising that the languages have so much in common with each other even English, which has borrowed a huge number of words from French and Latin at all stages of its history, even though it's technically a Germanic language and not Romance. *Of course there are also certain Indo-European similarities which transcend the family resemblances.* For instance "day", which English shares with German ("Tag") or Dutch ("dag") seems close to the other Romance words, once we take into account that "d" "g" "j" are quite similar sounds phonetically speaking. All these words share the Indo-European root *deyn-. Italian and French took their words from diurnus in Latin, while Spanish and Portuguese took theirs from the classical Latin "dies". "I" in English, shared with "ik" (Dutch) and "ich" (German) is also an instance of a clear Indo-European root shared with the Romance languages.
>
> *S10* What I consider most interesting, though, is how these variations came about in relation to the development and transformation of the languages overtime. *I'm a history major*, so I think it's pretty cool to *consider the variations within the context of how these parts of the world interacted with each other* … while language changed and developed over time, especially throughout the middle ages and the rise and fall of various expansive empires.

As this last comment highlights, "proximity zones" of linguistic systems may not only be caused by their common etymological roots but also by other historical, political and economic factors, as argued by Castagne (2011). Some of these emerged from the following student insights:

> *S7* Latin study has certainly proved helpful throughout every language I've studied since. Even English; though part of the Germanic family, not Romance; *was heavily influenced by French during the Norman conquest*. Today, a staggering near-forty percent of the English language is made up of French derivatives and

borrowings . . .

S2 While it is clear that Latin has influenced the English language, it seems to have had more of an impact on more sophisticated, descriptive words. The fundamentals such as good, what, and all are drastically different from the rest of the romance languages . . . *It would be interesting to consider the geographical influence upon the languages of these different European regions*.

S11 *The Germanic influences of the middle ages* resulted in such words as "all" come from the German "alle", unlike the French "tout", spanish todo and italian "tutto".

On the one hand, the social dimension of this learning environment (Spinelli, 2015b, p. 11) provided opportunities for peer-scaffolding, as in the examples above, in which students provided solutions to their peers' hypotheses about the etymological derivation of pronouns such as "I" and "all". On the other hand, it allowed the instructor to intervene with further feedback when needed playing the role of "amplifier of critical thinking" (Wei, 2014, p. 168).

One of the main goals of this type of reflective activity was to promote reflective processes such as *noticing*. As Boud and Walker (1990) state the process of noticing "is essential to the initiation of the reflective process and can provide further evidence on which to reflect" (p. 168). It involves students being primarily responsible for exploring their inner thoughts and feelings and examining their assumptions of an event. This process may lead to another important stage of thinking, that of viewing an event through multiple perspectives and multiple explanations, as in the phase of the sharing thoughts activity described earlier. In order to ensure that these reflective processes produce changes in students' practices, they need to take *deliberate actions* (Boud & Walker, 1990; Rodgers, 2002).[8]

The main goal of intercomprehension activities adopted during the course was to focus on this taking of action and encourage the third mode of the reflective framework described in this article, namely to promote critical thinking.[9]

One of these intercomprehension activities was proposed during week four of the course. It asked students to individually read an informative text in a Romance Language they did not know (i.e., Portuguese and Catalan) on a famil-

[8] *Deliberate actions* occur when students can think about what they have learnt during the reflective process and explain how this learning will change their future actions.

[9] *Intercomprehension* is a plurilingual approach to teaching. This approach aims to enhance the learner's capacity to co-construct meaning when languages come into contact with one another, and to understand a language without necessarily having studied it before. For instance, intercomprehension enables students to understand articles from newspapers written in, but not limited to, family-related languages (e.g., Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, French, Catalan, and Romanian) by referring to the similarities between these languages.

iar topic which was not related to the theme of the unit of the syllabus for that week. Immediately after the reading, students compiled a written self-report following some guidelines (Spinelli, 2015b, p. 6) aimed at recalling reading and plurilingual strategies adopted while tackling the reading text. Students were then asked to read an informative text in the target language (Italian) related to the topic of the unit for that week (i.e., food in Italy) and to repeat the same reflective activity comparing the cognitive processes activated during both readings. In the final stage, students shared their answers in the online forum discussion.

This collective act of sharing thoughts promoted peer-learning, and provided students with the opportunity to gain deeper insights into their reading experiences and use of plurilingual strategies.

According to the qualitative data collected during this phase, students mainly activated bottom-up processes focusing on lexical, morphological and syntactic affinity across languages (Spinelli, 2015a, 2015b).

Some of the examples provided below show the unique nature of how students make use of their plurilingual resources and pluriliteracies while dealing with the reading texts (Spinelli, 2015a, 2015b). Students mainly focused on lexical proximity of transparent words.[10] However, some of their reading strategies revealed a tendency to avoid semi-transparent words:

> *S1* I think that *I use transparent words a lot … but between Spanish and those languages which I think are less likely to lead to false cognates*. Even with words that weren't cognates, the other romance language knowledge helped. For example, in Spanish *ambos* means both. In Catalan *amb*, as it appeared in the sentences, clearly did not mean both, but I was able to figure out that it meant "with" which certainly conceptually has a relationship with "both".

Sometimes attention to cognates was due to the use of other information included in the text such as key words, the title, the context in which a word appears, and phonological and orthographic features:

> *S11* The context was also easy to make connections: *I could make historical connections* to find out some of the words. *The geographic locations like "Etrusca" bring to mind the Roman empire*, "evoluída" resonates with the french, "evoluer" …
>
> *S4* *I studied their respective titles* and thought of all the Spanish and Italian words that I immediately associated with them. *This allowed me to easily point out all*

[10] Castagne (2007) identifies three main dimensions of lexical transparency:

transparent words: those words that have a similar spelling and same meaning
semi-transparent words: words that have similar spelling but different meanings
opaque words: words that are different in terms of both spelling and meaning.

of the cognates and discern their meanings ... For example ... I paid attention to cognates like "nutrizione," "artiginale," and "condizioni di produzione." This helped me understand that the text was not only about food, but also about eating well and caring about the conditions in which food is produced ...

S3 *Only a few previously unknown words didn't seem transparent, and for those the context was usually enough to sense the meaning*. For instance, "sviluppare" wasn't immediately transparent but it is obvious form the context that it means something like "improve, increase, encourage".

S12 I think that in general I relied on transparent words ... using my knowledge of French to guess at words that I wouldn't otherwise be able to guess with English ... I skimmed the text as S13, S2, S14 ... *I read the second time out loud, guessing what the pronunciation would be, which I think also helped me recognize transparent words by sound and by sight* ...

Most of the students did not activate syntactic processes (Grabe, 2009; Perfetti, 2007). Only a few of them found the activation of these processes useful even though they were mainly focused on word ordering and organizational markers rather than on the morphological features of words, as shown in the following comments:

S13 Like S3, *I really didn't concern myself with grammatical structure* as I was reading.

S14 *I did not pay much notice to tenses or specific conjugations*; I was more focused on deciphering the general message from the pieces.

S12 Like S13 and S14 I skimmed the texts I know that the sentence structure or syntax of romance languages are similar. *I didn't go sentence by sentence and identify what I thought were the nouns, and verbs in each* ... Had I actually gone through and identified syntax sentence by sentence*, I think I would have lost the general understanding*. Losing the forest for the trees ...

S11 *I think the sentence structures were important* (contrary to what most are saying), understanding how a text is formed on a grander level and comparing structures helped to understand each sentence on an individual basis.

S2 *The "parole connettive"* [connective words] *were very useful* in allowing me to make assumptions in my reading.

S3 *I also tried to make some sense of the grammar, based on my knowledge of the grammar of other romance languages ... however this was to some degree limited* ... I think, by the fact that I don't know any Spanish, which as far as I know is more similar grammatically to Portuguese than are French, Italian or Latin. For instance, I thought I could recognize things like the imperfect tense in the verbs ending "-ram", the various definite and indefinite articles, certain past participles, ending "-d+agreement ending", infinitives.

Top-down processes were also activated but were mainly limited to making inferences from the titles of the articles and, in a few cases, from the pictures accompanying texts.

This online collective learning environment led students to focus on pos-

sible changes in their practices, as they pointed out:

S14 I think S4's point about using the sections titles is important, and *not something I thought of* ...

S7 *I hadn't thought about it* [using the title of the article to make inferences and identify cognates] *consciously* until I read S4's comments above I am often obsessed over English grammar and word order ...

S8 *I am going to try to specifically use of student* S12*'s strategy of reading* without analysis in order to ease my understanding ...

The students' tendency to employ bottom-up processes while reading was also confirmed through data collected from the midterm reading test and the post-reading test. Spinelli (2017) showed that lower-level processes (such as semantic, syntactic, and morphological processing) were diffusely activated during the reading test. However, students faced incremental difficulty in dealing with written texts when higher-level processes needed to be activated (e.g., knowledge of the genre and writer's purpose and feelings).

These difficulties were confirmed by the feedback provided by students in their post-reading questionnaire (Spinelli, 2017, p. 199). In this questionnaire, they were also asked to select which plurilingual activities they found most useful for preparing them to tackle the test readings. 64% of their preferences concerned plurilingual activities aimed at activating language transfers at the word level (e.g., differences between cognates and "false friends") and at the syntactic level (e.g., focusing on connective words and determiners), and the transfer of reading literacy skills (i.e., the intercomprehension activity and sharing reading and plurilingual strategies after the activity). This feedback was also provided during a classroom discussion on the midterm exam, which was audio recorded a week after the exam had been submitted. During the discussion, the instructor explained the reading test construct design and the reading sub-skills triggered by the different test items according to the levels of reading proficiency described by the CEFR from A1 to B1+ level (CoE, 2001).[11] Through this detailed explanation, students were better able to understand the level of reading proficiency in Italian that they had achieved based on their answers, and focus on the reading sub-skills that they needed to improve. Students also shared plurilingual strategies used while writing the test and discussed reasons why they did not answer questions correctly. The discussion focused particularly on a reading test item which ten out of fourteen students failed to answer due to a negative interlingual transfer.[12] This item aimed to

[11]The reading test consisted of three readings with a gradual increase in complexity: two informative texts (museum online brochure, short newspaper article) and one descriptive text (personal note).

[12]*Negative interlingual transfer* is the negative influence that a language of the stu-

test careful reading to identify local information in a personal note sent by a student to her ex-high school classmate. The item is the following:

> "Io sono a Milano e posso finalmente riabbracciare la mia famiglia dopo i mesi passati lontano … però mi mancano tanto le nostre chiacchierate, *i nostri compagni di liceo*, le passeggiate in riva al fiume in bicicletta. È triste ritornare nella nebbia di questo posto! Non vedo l'ora che tu esca dall'ospedale … "

I due ragazzi si sono conosciuti:

A. mentre erano in ospedale
B. durante una gita di gruppo
C. *in un contesto scolastico* (answer key)
D. perché sono amici di famiglia[13]

The word *contesto* in Italian ('context' in English) has, in fact, the English "false friend" *contest*. This "false friend" was misleading for students as they pointed out:

S5 Because if we say contest in English it means like … competition.

S8 I thought that it had something to do with school but then I thought it was a competition so I thought … school … but they might be involved in a project together.

The focus on bottom-up processes triggered by activities on lexical proximity, mainly adopted during this course, turned out to be misleading while dealing with this longer reading. However, it is worth noting that the item analysis conducted after the test and using a D-index value showed that this item was effective in differentiating well the students with higher and lower reading proficiencies.[14] De facto, detecting the semi-transparent word through a

dent's plurilingual repertoire has in the learning of the target language due to the differences existing between both languages.

[13]English translation:

> "I am back in Milan. I am happy to spend some time with my family after being away for so many months … But I miss our conversations, our classmates, and our bike rides by the river. It's sad to get back to the fog of this place! I can't wait for you to leave the hospital … "

The two young people first met:

A. in a hospital
B. during a trip
C. at school
D. due to their families

[14]The *D-index* indicates how an item differentiates the test takers who performed well from those who did poorly on the test. D-index values range from -1.00 to 1.00 and for the specific item described in the text the value was 0.75.

deeper understanding of the text allowed more proficient (plurilingual) readers to answer the question correctly.

Conclusion

The development of a reflective framework, as the one described in this article, allows for focusing on different types of reflection that can occur in a learning environment. This is an important aspect considering that outcomes strictly depend on the reflective process engaged in by individuals. Most significantly, the reflection process has "a central importance to the self" (Boyd & Fayles, 1983, p. 101). Therefore, reflective processes have a role in changing perspectives, perception of self, and practices. In the plurilingual learning environment described above, the three-mode reflective framework enabled students to:

- consider reflection as part of learning
- develop knowledge about emotions and their links with attitude towards languages and linguistic diversity
- better operationalize their plurilingual system
- perceive assessment as a part of their plurilingual learning experience

These outcomes have been facilitated by students' agency in producing learning materials for further reflection, contributing in this way to data generation. Hatton and Smith (1995) suggest involving students in a "more relatively simplistic type of reflection [descriptive reflection] ... then working through different forms of reflection-on- action [dialogic and critical reflection]" (p. 45). This reflective pathway leads students to an "alterative change" (Prasad, 2014, p. 54), that is, reflective learning plays a crucial role in changing cognitive and affective perspectives of plurilingual speakers. This change guides students to develop "reflection-in-action" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 45), namely to *deliberately* activate reflective processes in future practices.

Through the pedagogical activities described in this article and through language(s) socialization, students were, in fact, able to reflect upon and restructure conceptual categories (e.g., emotions, identity, linguistic and cultural systems) and make sense of their individual and collective plurilingualism. This enabling methodology assumes that students have their own voices, experiences and histories. Its main goal is to enhance this plurality instead of leading to the homogenization of student experiences. Reflective practices were also necessary to holistically link "in the moment and from moment to moment" (Rodger, 2002, p. 235) learning and assessment processes. Students were able to evaluate the quality and make sense of their teaching, learning and assessment experience, gaining a deeper understanding of a process in which *tout se tient*.

In this respect, as mentioned above, research literature on plurilingual teaching and learning mainly involves reflection to promote plurilingual competences, strategies, and pluri-identity construction. However, the relationship between plurilingual students' reflection, self-efficacy, and achievement still needs to be explored. This study represents a preliminary attempt to reach this goal.

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