

Interacting in Luxembourgish as an Additional Language: An Analysis of the Role of the Social Context among Multilingual Adults Learning Luxembourgish

Interaction en luxembourgeois comme langue additionnelle: Analyse du rôle du contexte social comme médiateur entre l'apprenant adulte et la langue cible

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Abstract

This paper presents ongoing research into the role of the social context in learning Luxembourgish as an additional language. Emphasis is laid on the use of Luxembourgish by adult learners who already speak at least two of the languages in use in the country; namely French, German (the official languages), English and Portuguese (other important languages). Within the framework of the ecology of language, which views language as a social process, this study uses a triangulation method for data collection and argues that in order to understand third language acquisition in multilingual contexts, there is a need to analyse the target language (TL) in action during everyday activities and the structuring of linguistic environment that affords TL use. The analysis of language uses discourse analysis and aims at showing how the learner of Luxembourgish is part of the society by acting as a user of the TL and through the opportunities that are created/offered. The analysis of Luxembourgish as a mean for acting in interactions is a path forward to the ecological approach of language acquisition.

Keywords: interaction, multilingualism, Luxembourgish, language acquisition.

Résumé

Cet article présente une étude en cours sur le rôle du contexte social comme médiateur entre l'apprenant adulte et le luxembourgeois comme langue additionnelle. L'accent est mis sur l'usage que l'apprenant plurilingue parlant au moins deux des langues en usage au Luxembourg; notamment le français, l'allemand (langues officielles), l'anglais et le portugais (autres langues usuelles) fait de la langue cible au quotidien. L'étude s'inscrit dans la logique de l'approche

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écologique de la langue qui définit l'acquisition d'une langue comme un processus social, un système en relation avec les autres systèmes de l'écosystème social et donc, une entité qui ne peut être analysée hors de son contexte. Les données tirées de la triangulation des méthodes seront analysées suivant la méthodologie de l'analyse du discours. L'étude vise à montrer comment l'apprenant plurilingue du luxembourgeois agit en interagissant au quotidien à travers les opportunités qui sont créées/offertes et qui font du contexte le « médiateur » entre l'apprenant et la langue cible.

Mots clés : interaction, multilinguisme, luxembourgeois, acquisition des langues.

1. An ecological perspective on learning Luxembourgish

1.1 The ecology of language

“The wonders of language and language development are very closely tied to the ways in which we use language everyday” (Van Lier, 2002, p.160). The ecology of language (EL) and the sociocultural theory of language acquisition (SCT) study language as an activity, a tool that learners use to negotiate meaning in social interactions (Brouwer, 2003; Van Lier, 2004; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008; Kees De Bot, 2008). Language is part of the ecosystem and as such, evolves and develops in relationship with the other systems. Kramsch (2002) asserts that language acquisition is a socialization process; i.e. language development is mediated through social and semiotic activity. Van Lier further discusses language as a social phenomenon and claims that: “When we are active in a setting, affordances are created by our activity and the surrounding world” (Van Lier, 2002, p.150). In other words, language learning becomes efficient with use, with the learners’ action and interaction in the target language (TL). The study of language acquisition as related to the social context puts to the forth the nature of language as a tool for acting in interactions, meaning that language is intimately linked with the social activities in which it is used. According to (Van Lier, 2002, p.159) language is activity-based, because it “is naturally supported *by* and supportive *of* social activity, and in these two senses naturally scaffolded, that is, within human activity language gives and receives just as much as is needed.” Because language is an activity-based and a system among the ecosystem of social activities, language acquisition is a “dynamic process” (Herdina & Jessner, 2008) depending on a number of social factors such as affordances; i.e. “possibilities for action that yield opportunities for engagement and participation” (Van Lier, 2004, p.81). Hence, the study of language acquisition includes that of language socialization, i.e. how language is used in social interactions.

1.2 The linguistic situation in Luxembourg

Situated in the middle of Europe with French, German and Dutch as the languages spoken in the neighbour countries, Luxembourg provides a unique environment for the analysis of third language acquisition in multilingual contexts. Since 1984, French and German have been established the official languages and

Luxembourgish the national one. Other languages of importance in Luxembourg are English (with European institutions and international banks) and Portuguese (spoken by the majority of the immigrant population). Because most of the new comers in Luxembourg dispose of different first languages (more than 175 nationalities, see STATEC, 2010), Luxembourgish is more and more promoted as an asset for living in the country and Actions are carried out for newcomers to understand that learning Luxembourgish may be important (Fehlen, 2009).

In such a multilingual context where two historically and internationally grounded languages play official roles, learning the national language may present some difficulties related to language use as different languages coexist everyday. This paper presents ongoing research into the role of the context in learning Luxembourgish among multilingual adults. Grounded on the ecological approach to language acquisition, the study uses analytical tools developed in CA (Conversation Analysis) for the analysis of Luxembourgish as a social entity that moves and develops in everyday activities as it coexists with other languages.

The majority of the paper will be an attempt to show how the multilingual speaker perceives the learning of Luxembourgish. The analysis of this *learners' talk about LLAL* (learning Luxembourgish as an Additional Language) during a previous study serves as a base to presenting the ongoing research project and the methodological approach that was further developed so as to critically observe what it means to learn Luxembourgish when one is a multilingual speaker in Luxembourg.

2. The challenge of learning an additional language in a multilingual context

Previous research analysed official and social discourses on the motives of individuals to learn Luxembourgish and found out that learning is influenced by the values attributed to the TL and reasons that can help learners achieving their objectives (Ouafo, 2009). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) grounded this first research on learning Luxembourgish as an additional language (Wodak & Meyer, 2001; Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2005). The study analysed reports and discourses on the promotion of Luxembourgish (official discourse) and a focus group conversation with adult learners of Luxembourgish (social discourse) and identified a contradiction on whether or not Luxembourgish should be learned by newcomers. On the one hand, the official discourses consider Luxembourgish as the language of the Nation and Culture. Therefore, it is the language to be learned by whoever wants to move to Luxembourg. On the other hand, the social discourses describe the fact that there is no need to learn Luxembourgish for individuals who already speak French and/or German.

The example used in this paper was selected from the focus group conversation with six adult learners of Luxembourgish born in Bosnia, Ethiopia, France, Russia, Turkey and the USA, and aged between 30 and 50 years old. The discussion was stimulated by relevant extracts from official documents and participants were free to use French, German, Luxembourgish and/or English for discussion. The 38 minutes recording was transcribed using Transana tools (Woods, 2008) and presented following the GAT convention system (Selting, 1998).

In the following extract, Zoé (from France), Ida (from Russia) and Ann (from Turkey) challenge their different understandings of why to learn Luxembourgish is important. The languages used in the extract are Luxembourgish, English and French.

Example

- 001 Zoé: ech menge Lëtzebuergesch ass wechteg ehh fir d'soziale, [...]an si sinn ehh méi
I think Luxembourgish is important ehh for the social [...]and they are more
002 frëndlech [...] wann ehh Franséich Fransoz schwätzen Lëtzebuergesch [...] friendly when[...]when ehh French French people speak Luxembourgish [...]
- 007 Ida: yes, i agree because ah (-) eh for example, when we come to Luxembourg i
008 made my presentations in English(.) they are not so friendly with you (-) But
009 and when you use several sentences with lux eh Luxembourgish, it eh **they are**
010 **more interested in the service**
- 011 Zoé: donc, en fait, on pourrait très bien vivre sans l'apprendre aussi;
so, in fact, one could very well live without learning too;
012 **puisque tout le monde parle français ou anglais** = on n'a pas besoin d'autre
since every body speaks French or English = on does not need other
013 langue = là c'est facile (-)
languages = there it is easy (-)
- 014 Ann: non mais **c'est assez contradictoire** parce qu'on nous dit oui le
no but it is enough contradictory because we are told yes
014 luxembourgeois c'est important etc eh eh oui! (-) et après d'un
Luxembourgish is important etc eh eh yes! (-) and then from the
015 autre côté, la société au quotidien eh bah parler le
other hand, the society everyday eh bah speaking
016 luxembourgeois c'est presque difficile (0.3) donc tu vois, en fait
Luxembourgish is very difficult (0.3) then you see, in fact
017 c'est assez aa **APPRENDRE luxembourgeois c'est très DUR et ne pas**
it is enough ll **LEARNING Luxembourgish it is very HARD and not to**
018 **le savoir c'est aussi PEnible** quand on habite dans le pays
know it is also Difficult when one lives in the country

The reasons for learning, according to the discussion above, are related to the values attributed to the language to be learned. Zoé, Ida and Ann share the common understanding of the importance of Luxembourgish for the social life, and discuss the fact that Luxembourgish people are “more friendly” when foreigners speak their language (01-02). The value of Luxembourgish as a tool for getting close to people is supported and further developed by Ann and Ida (01-10). The three women confront their different understandings of the need for Luxembourgish and Zoé argues that there is no real need for learning Luxembourgish since everyone speaks French or English (11-12). Ann opposes this point of view and describes a “contradiction” (014) in the value attributed to Luxembourgish by the society because there is no way to use the TL in everyday life. Note the parallel stress on the three words, “LEARNING”, “HARD” and “Difficult” (017-018). The alignment of these three words can be analysed as an explicit perception of the learning of Luxembourgish being useless because of lack of opportunities for speaking.

The critical analysis of the values attributed to Luxembourgish by official and social discourses show that learning Luxembourgish is important and advised to newcomers in the country. Yet, learners face the problem of not being able to use the TL because “everybody speaks French or English” (see example, 011-012). This problem, analysed as the contradiction in the learning of Luxembourgish, implies that language learning and language use are deeply embedded together and learning a language without using it may hinder the development in the TL. Therefore, analysing language learning in correlation with language use is important for describing the learner of a language as acting through using the TL (Ziegler, 2008).

3. Investigating on Luxembourgish within the context of its co-construction

3.1 Qualitative research on learning Luxembourgish

The contradiction in the learning of Luxembourgish resulting from the previous study suggests that further research should be carried out so as to contrast the learners' talk and learners' action in interactions. Primary data for the ongoing study results from audio recording of everyday activities of eight multilingual learners of Luxembourgish. The recordings and the field notes that support them provide data for analysing real situations and contexts of language use and learning. Emphasis is laid on the analysis of value in the activities; i.e. instances of language use and opportunities that are offered to/created for the learner to speak the language that s/he learns. Secondary data for research endeavour results from a focus group conversation with six of the eight participants to the recordings. Like for the participants in previous research, the group conversation offers a space for sharing, challenging and developing different opinions about the learning and using of Luxembourgish (Denzin, 2003). However, more than a content analysis following CDA methodology, the study goes deeper into the analysis of the target language in action (01-02), using CA's analytical tools to explore Luxembourgish as it coexists with other languages in interactions (see example). Another data set are questionnaires, which give insight on participants' perspectives on learning Luxembourgish; i.e. their intended motives for learning as well as the contexts and situations of language use (Ouafo & Ziegler, forthcoming, 2013).

3.2 The Luxembourgish learners' talk and the learners' action

This paper has presented ongoing research on the correlation between language learning and language use among multilingual learners in a multilingual context. The analysis follows a cross-boundary approach to learner language, using sociocultural theory of language learning and discourse analysis completed by conversation analysis for analysing the specific interactional context of the learner's actions. According to sociocultural theory language learning results from language-in-use (Mitchell & Myles 2004, Van Lier 2004, Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005, Pallotti 2007). For example, participants to the focus group discussion can engage in different actions of disagreeing, confirming or negotiating their different perspectives and experiences of learning Luxembourgish. These actions then, are analysed by using conversation analysis. The project analyses both language-in use with emphasis on affordances and actions that utterances are doing with respect to learners' perspective on learning and relying on and using the language.

In line with recent research into the contextual as well as ecological nature of language learning, the study explores Luxembourgish language learning as related to interactions in social activities. By analysing Luxembourgish as a means for acting in interaction, the study sheds light on the learners' engagement with the

social contexts in which the language learning is taking place and the structuring of the learning opportunities that are co-constructed (May, 2007; Grosjean, 2008). These insights into the role of language in interaction as done and discussed by the learners with regard to the actual multilingual situation in the linguistic context of interest is key for understanding language learning in multilingual contexts.

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