A case for crosslinguistic awareness in L3 classrooms at the university level

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Abstract:

It has been shown that learners build on their knowledge of previously acquired languages (Ringbom, 2007), that they rely on their language learning experience and that cross-consultation of their multilingual repertoire leads them to develop metalinguistic awareness (Jessner, 2008). However, many language programs are still constrained by a monolingual bias. This study explores the benefits of crosslinguistic awareness-raising activities in two instructional settings – Quebec and Mexico – where the monolingual principle (Cummins, 2007) is invoked by more or less explicit policies of language separation.

The main objective is to examine the perceived usefulness of pedagogical activities aimed at promoting crosslinguistic reflection. University-level language courses were targeted: English/Spanish (Quebec); English/French (Mexico). Three customized activities were implemented in each language course. The targeted structures were chosen in collaboration with the instructors and the activities developed to meet the instructors' needs. Activities were designed in an inductive approach and included three phases: an input-based, a reflective during which participants were asked to make assumptions on underlying patterns and correspondences across languages and a controlled practice where learners manipulated the targeted structure in a communicative setting.

While activities were generally perceived as useful, preliminary analyses of post-task questionnaires also revealed mixed feelings regarding an approach in which learners cannot rely on deductive explicit instruction. However, the verbal data collected during the metalinguistic phase revealed a growing awareness of crosslinguistic correspondences, from which appropriate assumptions could be inferred. Comparative analyses will shed further light on the effectiveness of multilingual practices in monolingual-biased instructional settings.

Keywords: Metalinguistic awareness ; Third language acquisition ; Crosslinguistic pedagogy