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Translanguaging and empathy: effects of a performative approach to language learning

Performance and theatre, as forms of action and communication, create a wealth of learning opportunities for language students, which are staged, sensorial, embodied, and multi-faceted constitutions of reality. Performance here is more than simply playing or showing (as if): it is an immediate, total, performative doing and speaking. (Sting, 2012, p.55)

Introduction

In this article, I discuss the notion of performative pedagogy in language learning at school.

Although the term *performance* is frequently used in the French education system, it is mostly associated with the notion of scores, good marks, and surpassing oneself – sometimes even others – similar to high-level athletics. In the context of the arts, however, performance is an invitation to transform what is already known, to build a new reality (Fischer-Lichte, 2012, p. 26). As Schechner (2008, p. 97) points out, performance is emergent and social. It is an encounter. In this, it is situated and activates sensorimotor, emotional and aesthetic registers (Dewey, 1934; Schaeffer, 2015), as well as empathic mechanisms (Fischer-Lichte, 2012, p. 26). These co-verbal registers seem to be rarely taken into consideration in French education. Nevertheless, in view of my first experiments, they appear primary in language learning. Why, and to what extent?

What is the nature of the connections between aesthesia¹, space, emotions, movement, and language learning at school? Schewe (2011) defines languages as ways for encounters to emerge “in the theatricality of the everyday” (p. 23). He therefore proposes implementing a performance-centred language teaching that moves away from controlled communication situations in the classroom towards an aesthetic experience of performed language. The “performative teaching-learning culture” that he defends, relying on Fischer-Lichte (2004), is based on key words from theatre science, such as body, voice, presence and space, inherent in “the triad: event – direction – aesthetic experience” (ibid, p. 28).

¹From the Greek αἴσθησις (aísthēsis): “perception, feeling”. Aristotle evoked *aisthesis* as the interweaving of thought and sensation, knowledge and perception. Aesthesia thus means sensing using internal and external sensory organs, and constitutes a low-level mechanism of understanding.

What does “performance” mean in the context of “linguaging” (Maturana & Varela, 1984/2012, p.226) in the classroom? For Varela (1989), “linguaging” is much more than the ability to formulate words or intelligible sentences. It concerns the act of language, a vital biological function for human beings. Language is multimodal and also occurs in emotions, sensorimotor mechanisms, and verbal expression. It is defined as the capacity of humans to connect to each other, which enables meaning to emerge from their interactions.

In this article, I propose a reflection on the effects of a performative pedagogical design on certain aspects of students’ language learning, based on a micro analysis taken from a longitudinal study (AiLES²). In this experiment, foreign language lessons combined drama sessions with more traditional forms of teaching. This research reveals the leverage effect of a *performative pedagogy* (Schewe, 2011), which I will show through extracts from one of the six study cases that I am analysing. I focus primarily on two complementary aptitudes: that of switching from one language (both verbal and non verbal) to another (translanguaging³) (Aden, 2013; Canagarajah, 2011; Creese & Backledge, 2010; Garcia, 2009), and that of putting oneself in the place of another through an encounter (empathy) (Aden, 2010; Davis, 1983/1994; Thirioux and Jorland, 2008).

I base my analysis on research tools, which are qualitative (semi-directed and phenomenological interviews, my research diary, an observation protocol and video data) as well as quantitative (psychometric empathy IRI, Davis, 1980).

I highlight the connections that seem to emerge through performative activities between

- a) aesthetic experience/creativity (Couchot, 2012; Dewey, 1934/1980; Goodman, 1984; Schaeffer, 2015; Piccardo, 2016),
- b) students’ capacity to adopt a low and/or high level of empathy (Berthoz, 2004; Pacherie, 2004; Thirioux, 2014),
- c) and their capacity to *translanguage* (Aden, 2013; Eschenauer, 2014).

1. The AiLES study: enactive teaching taking into account the complex reality of the systemic composition of a language class

After a brief description of the AiLES study, I will present more specifically which performative approach is used within this framework. I will also show how this aesthetic and emergent pedagogy was organised in practice.

1.1. Research questions

The focus here will be on two specific questions that I will attempt to shed light on through analyses:

² “Arts in Language Education for an Empathic Society”

³ Historically, in English literature (Williams, 1997; Garcia, 2009; Creese & Backledge, 2010; Canagarajah, 2011 and other more recent publications), the term *translanguaging* defines the capacity of bilingual or plurilingual children to draw from all of their linguistic registers to express themselves. Aden extends this meaning by including a holistic dimension of language that takes in all non-verbal and verbal registers, in all their emotional, kinaesthetic, sensorial and linguistic complexity.

What impact can a performative approach have on the joint learning of several modern languages?

Can we observe connections, during performative work, between the students' capacity to translanguage, their aptitude for empathy, and their aesthetic experience?

1.2. Research design

The AiLES action research was empirical, longitudinal (2011-2015) and qualitative (not concerned by a control group). It involved a multilingual/multicultural secondary school class in a Parisian suburb with significant social issues. The class featured 13 family languages, plus three languages studied at school, i.e. 16 languages for 20 students. This class was chosen because the students were learning two foreign languages simultaneously (German and English) during the four middle-school years (*classe bilangue*⁴). AiLES required creating emergent learning sessions in all the languages of the class (Aden & Eschenauer, 2014; Eschenauer, 2014). The educational staff (in our case artists, researchers and teachers) co-constructed performative and didactic scenarios with the students which evolved over time depending on the students' creative productions (s. § 1.3).

Using a mixed method, my goal was to understand the learning processes, and thus the students' perspective. I make a coarse analysis to study the meso level (the class), and a detailed analysis to concentrate on the micro level, which involves six case studies. The macro level (the Community of Practice) is the object of other research.

The artistic interventions were documented taking a qualitative approach, with the objective of a triangulation of perspectives (students' first-person observations with semi-structured and explicitation⁵ interviews, third-person observations with interviews of teachers and artists, video recordings and my observation protocols). From a quantitative point of view, I focus on the evolution of students' empathy attitudes based on the four empathy characteristics defined by Davis (1980) and evaluated using his *Interpersonal Reactivity Index* (IRI)⁶ psychometric test, and the

⁴ The first *bilangue* classes involved isolated cases of German and English teaching starting in the 1980s and gaining in visibility in 2002. More *bilangue* classes opened following a diversification of language teaching in elementary schools in 2000, followed by the launch of the CEFR in 2001. The aim was that students could simultaneously learn two languages (one of them English) from the start of secondary school, totalling between four and eight hours of language teaching per week compared to the standard four hours for only one language at the same level. They were institutionalised in 2004 for English and German, then in 2007 for other modern languages including Spanish, Italian, Russian and Mandarin, with German representing the biggest proportion. The recommendation of six hours of language teaching (three for each language) has now been adopted for all classes following the middle school reform in place since September 2016.

⁵ Explicitation interviews are phenomenological, based on a technique developed by Vermersch (1994) and involve soliciting procedural-type information in order to reveal sources of expertise and error. The interview can work to recall experience buried in the subconscious (pre-reflected consciousness). Vermersch, like Varela with whom he worked, uses Husserl's phenomenology in his approach.

⁶ The IRI is a psychometric empathy test developed by the psychologist Mark H. Davis in 1980. Since the 1980s, two types of empathy have been documented, i.e. emotional empathy, meaning the emotional reaction to the observation of an affective state; and cognitive empathy, meaning the ability to mentally project oneself onto the person observed or with whom one is interacting. Davis considered empathy as a complex process that could simultaneously involve several mechanisms. His psychometric test therefore features four subscales containing seven items each, enabling the joint measurement of both levels (affective and mental): perspective taking (PT), fantasy scale (FS), empathic concern (EC) and personal

ego/allocentric, interpersonal and spatio-temporal dimension conferred to it by Thirioux and Berthoz (2010). A transdisciplinary crossing (languages, performative sciences, neurosciences) was performed to interpret the data. The neurophenomenologist Bérangère Thirioux also enlightened and advised me on how to analyse the results of my data.

1.3. Pedagogical framework

Two actors, who were native speakers of the target language, worked in their mother tongue (German or English) in twenty two-hour sessions per year, within regular lessons. Language teachers were present and either incorporated the drama sessions into their teaching objectives or communicated their class work to the actors, who then used the main themes to devise their drama sessions. These theatre/drama practice sessions in either or both English and German also provided an opportunity to introduce French and the first languages of the pupils. The teaching relied on an aesthetic language experience (which means felt and acted through the body). Students used non-verbal language (miming, gestures, emotions) to enable verbal languages to emerge in drama improvisations, which evolved into complex, aesthetic performances (s. §2). Warm-ups (vocal and muscular) and activities (consideration of space, research through image production, writing and acting) obliged the pupils to broaden their expression (through breathing, movement, intonation, attitude, gesture, mimicry, written and spoken texts, etc.). The artistic practices employing languages in the drama workshops included dramatic improvisation, dance, singing, visual arts and video, chosen by the students in the course of their performances. This non-verbal, emotional, sensorimotor and verbal multilingual *linguaging* is what Aden (2013) calls *translangager*: “a dynamic act of relatedness to oneself, to others and to one’s environment” (p. 115). The students’ creations formed the basis of their foreign language learning. They sprung from a theme chosen by the class at the beginning of each year from their philosophical debates on topical issues⁷. The students’ imaginary scenes and stories were enriched by cultural content introduced in the class (philosophical reflections, picture books, works of visual and cinematographic art, novels and plays), as well as outings to concerts, museums, and to attend performances of contemporary works. The stories were then reworked and developed in class in German, English and occasionally French. In this framework, the formal linguistic teaching (vocabulary, grammar, etc.) was worked into the aesthetic, oral and written productions. The structure was not fixed in advance and evolved over

distress (PD). Test subjects can respond to each item on a scale of 0 to 4 ranging from “Does not describe me well” to “Describes me very well”. Davis (1994: 56–57) describes the four subscales as follows:

i) Perspective Taking: “the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others in everyday life”; ii) Empathic Concern: “assesses ‘other-oriented’ feelings of sympathy and compassion for unfortunate others”; iii) Personal Distress: “taps the tendency to experience distress and discomfort in response to extreme distress in others. ‘Self-oriented’ feelings of personal anxiety and unease in tense interpersonal settings”; iv) Fantasy Scale: “measures the tendency to imaginatively transpose oneself into fictional situations” (books, movies, and plays).

Many studies have used this test, including Cliffordson (2002) and Paulus (2012), on which I will rely to analyse the results of the test taken by the subjects I have been studying. For our study, we translated the items into French and adapted the phrasing of the questions slightly so that teenagers could identify with them.

⁷ Four themes were chosen: Year 1: Encounters. Year 2: Freedom of meaning and speech. Year 3: Hero figures and personal heroes. Year 4: To be free, conform or rebel.

time, but there was a clear framework of teaching objectives, which included not only verbal and non-verbal language skills, but emotional competences.

“I take the students down a path. And that means they need to be available, sense what’s happening, what might happen, and what won’t happen. They need to pick up on the unexpected, allow themselves to be surprised, and to surprise themselves. It’s all constantly moving and evolving. We had to change the text, take stuff out or add stuff in, depending on the actors and the moment, so as to always stay as close as possible to what they have to take on.” [German-speaking actor. End-of-project questionnaire. Eschenauer, S. (2017)]

“Intimately linked to creativity, emergence is the continual arising of new patterns” (Aden, 2016: p.106). The sessions led by the two actors and the two teachers enabled the students to become aware, through the phenomenological dimension of learning as a “living” experience AND metacognitive reflection, of all these forms of *linguaging*, which are generally not part of language teaching in French schools (see Part 2).

To summarise, here is a diagram, which shows how the experiment was organised⁸:



Fig. 1: Organisation of performative pedagogy in a language class. AiLES experiment. Excerpt from thesis. Eschenauer, S. (2017)

2. Performance, aesthetic experience and empathy in the language class

2.1. Performance in language learning reinterpreted in the light of the arts and in the field of enaction

In the approach I study, performance is a means and a lever for activating three levels of intra- and intersubjective experience that interact in language learning, i.e. aesthetic experience, empathy and translanguaging.

The English term “performance” (late 15th century) has very different meanings if we look at its etymology⁹. The Latin prefix *per-* (through; throughout, over; during; in the manner of, by means of), combined with the substantive *forma* (form, shape, beauty), evoke the spatio-temporal and formal transformation of all known shapes, whether

⁸ The performative activities of the first year of this project are described on the trilingual website www.goethe.de/france/bilanguages

⁹ Gaffiot French-Latin dictionary, 1934, p. 1140 (*per*) and p. 679 (*forma*)

concrete (objects, arrangement in space) or abstract (forms of speech, ideas). The Old English word “performance” has evolved into the modern English word *happening*, in other words, a work-event in which the public takes part (work in progress). The second origin of the meaning of *performance* is linked to *deixis*, what means the act, and the art, of showing without words, but also showing “in addition,” showing “more.”

Per-form-ance results from a process (-*ance*) of *trans*-formation in students’ learning culture.

In my study, as we shall see in the analysis (§3), performance turns out to be the means by which we relate to the other, the lever for its development, the biological mechanisms of which (automatic and intellectual) are rooted in attitudes of empathy. Relationships are at the heart of languages. In addition, students’ personal and shared experiences of performance seem to allow them to develop what Sting has called “aesthetic competence”. This capacity also seems closely connected to language learning processes.

“In aesthetic communication (that is, the arts, culture, the media and also everyday life), by aesthetic competence we mean the capacity to receptively, productively and reflectively consider aesthetic phenomena and artefacts, which means being capable of reading, understanding, using and creating them” (Sting, 2003: 12).

As pointed out by Sting (*ibid.*), at the heart of aesthetic competence is always *das sich bildende Subjekt*, in other words, “the self-constructing subject”, the “subject taking shape” and “the subject imbuing itself with culture” (the term *Bildung* is polysemic in German). In our experiment, we stimulated this competence in pupils through theatrical activities always connected to language lessons.

The teaching methods implemented in AiLES and other studies currently under way are performative in this sense, in as much as they are primarily centred on the transforming processes of students via their aesthetic experience of language, through drama (Fischer-Lichte, 2004: p. 341). The goal of these transforming processes is that students should be autonomous in their learning and capable of using their languages appropriately (i.e. according to the situation: choice of language, register (verbal, non-verbal, co-verbal), language level, etc.). By autonomy I take the meaning stipulated by Trocmé-Fabre (2013), in other words, what students intimately experience in their learning, a reorganization of their knowledge with no outside guidance and involving three major actions: “understand:> **enter into resonance**; integrate (learn) :> **welcome the new into what is already there**; communicate (etym. Co-munio) :> **build together** (literally: build together (co-) fortifications (moenia)” (p. 116).

This performative pedagogy fits into a broader scientific paradigm, that is, Francisco Varela’s enaction paradigm (1993). Enaction defines language as humans’ capacity to connect through action. This paradigm is based on the biological (Maturana & Varela, 1994) and phenomenological (Husserl, 1905-1935; Merleau-Ponty, 1945) bases of knowledge. For Varela, meaning emerges from common action, through shared holistic *languages*, before verbalisation, so that we can build a world together without even speaking the same *language*. In the AiLES study, the educational staff implemented an enactive approach to teaching (Aden, 2014a/b) based on this paradigm, through a “performative teach-and-learn culture” (Schewe, 2011).

At the heart of exchange and communication, therefore, was not the verbal language to be learnt, but human language with linguistic variants depending on the repertoire used. This language was exaggeratedly stylised in the acting, thus galvanising processes of conscientisation through bodily perception (visual, auditory, sensorimotor, emotional). All of these forms of aesthetic perception-action experienced in foreign languages were connected to the students' language biographies. They fit into spatiality and temporality, which they transform (at the theatre, a small space can become the universe, a large stage can turn into a microcosm; in the space of one minute we can live several years or be transported to the future. The pace can be stretched by slow motion or accelerated by acting). In this new jointly-built reality, the young people act with, in and through? languages. Based on results from other research projects in the neuroaesthetic domain, we can hypothesise that our experiential process activated hyperstimuli in the brain (Pelletier, 2014: 144) that fostered learning.

When classroom activities are centred on the verbal ones (oral and/or written), we often give very little place to the body and emotion. This diagram shows how the actors transformed the balance of the language activity by initially emphasising sensorimotor, emotional and non-verbal activities, and then moved on to solicit verbal activities, always oral to start with, then written, and then oral once more.

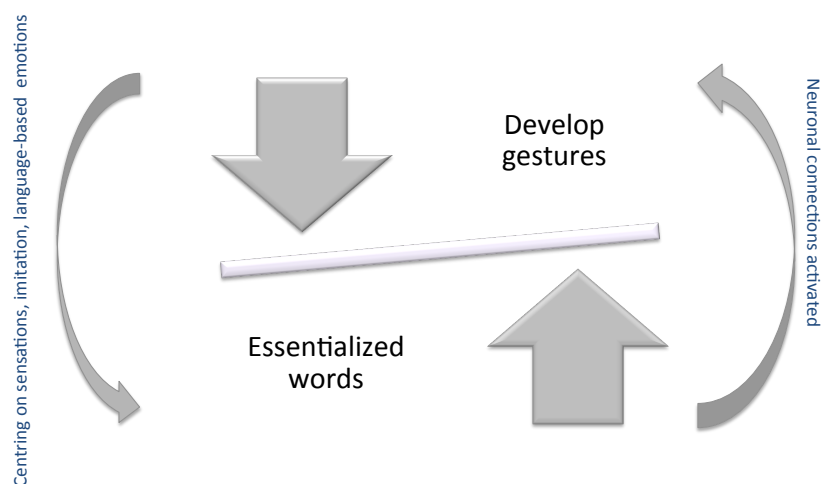


Fig. 2: Impacts of an aesthetic theatre-based approach using languages. Source: Excerpt from thesis by Eschenauer, S. (2017, p. 196)

The impact on linguistic learning of practising drama during language lessons is manifest in a new balance. The performative work brings verbal language down to its essence: every word and sentence draws its essence from the action experienced or imagined. Students therefore feel concerned and moved. The theatrical acting stylises non-verbal language (“enlarges” the sensorimotor perceptions-actions at the base of cognition). The (non verbal) known moves towards the unknown (expression in foreign languages), which through this experience thus becomes known (learning). This is one of the results of the AiLES study summed up below.

“Performance puts phenomena, processes and actions in the foreground, rather than text, structure or symbol as an underlying aspect to be interpreted or portrayed” (Sting, 2012: 121).

The pupils' *performance* is here connected to their capacity to make meaning emerge through joint action that affects them and sets them into motion (*e-motion*), rather than their capacity to describe and sum up a text or an image, which is a common activity in the French classroom. 'Performance' is indeed "a concept or metaphor that foregrounds the creative, constructed, collaborative and contingent nature of human communication and interaction... (it) refers to (...) an embodied way of knowing" (Schechner, 2002: 13).

2.2. *Aesthetics and empathy in language teaching and learning*

"No 'true' definition exists [of the aesthetic concept]. (...) It sometimes refers to a sensitive component of our understanding of the world, as opposed to intellectual understanding, or a form of pleasure resulting from sense activity". (Pignocchi, 2012: 292)

In this study, on the one hand, I refer to the aesthetic experience (Dewey, 1934; Schaeffer, 2015), in as much as it is directly connected to the sensitive experience as a way to access knowledge (Baumgarten, 1750); on the other hand, I refer to the study of aesthetics proposed by the German philosopher Vischer (1873), in which he introduced the concept of *Einfühlung*, translated as *empathy* in English by the psychologist Titchener in 1909. In his thesis, he undertook an investigation to describe the perceptive transformations connected to aesthetic judgement. This philosophical conception of the access to knowledge through "feeling into" and in space is widely validated by cognitive neuroscience (Spitzer, 2009; Thirioux et Jorland, 2008; Varela, 1989). Aesthetic perception should not be defined with contradictory words, such as conceptual *or* perceptive, spiritual *or* sensitive, emotion *or* reason. These phenomena are in fact in deep interaction (Pignocchi, 2012: 297).

It is the conjunction of these two features, i.e. the anchoring in our basic cognitive and emotive resources and the very specific usage we make of it, that characterises aesthetic experience (Schaeffer, 2015, p. 16).

In working with artists and learning to become a thinking, plurilingual *spect-actor* (Boal, 1978/2004: 21), the pupils involved in AiLES undergo a double aesthetic experience, i.e., it is both felt and acted. Teachers' comparative accounts of pupils' language aptitudes attest to a clear difference between pupils that took part in the experiment and those in their other classes: the former were more autonomous because they could draw on what they had learned throughout middle school. We observed the historic connection established between empathy and aesthetic experience.

We can put forward the hypothesis that aesthetic drama work effectively activates the empathy mechanisms at the root of translingual competence.

Empathy mechanisms constitute the basis of intercultural competence... We need to get out of our 'cultural skin', move away from our egocentric viewpoint to move into a 'foreign' linguistic system with a different understanding of reality. (Aden, 2014: p.105 – 106)

Below, I provide a sample analysis of the transformative processes that a pupil - whom I shall call Chelsea - underwent over the duration of the study.

3. Corpus analysis: aesthetic experience through performance, empathy and translanguaging. A case study: Chelsea

3.1. Empathy – translanguaging variables – aesthetic experience

For this micro-analysis, I consider the performative language work carried out during the final year of the experiment. At the very start of the academic year, the students did a workshop with Lutz Hübner. The writer and director started by asking them what interested and moved them and what made them ask questions. He then initiated a number of improvisations to ascertain their temperament, choices, etc. Lastly, he thought up a scenario with them, co-written with Sarah Nemitz, in which they would play themselves (young people from the Parisian suburb of Bobigny, who love to sing, dance, play video games, etc.) at the same time as being someone else (they had to invent their own character). The pupils all enjoyed watching TV-reality shows, and so it was decided that the core of their story would be about young people from Bobigny taking part in a TV-reality show with an aim of giving a “true” image of the suburb. However, rather like the play “Creeps”, the characters (i.e. the students) would gradually become aware of the media manipulation at work in this type of programme¹⁰. The students were accompanied by the teachers in their analysis. Only three students played a role that was proposed by the authors, following their improvisation efforts. This included the presenter of the show and two studio manipulators, against whom the group ultimately rebelled.

Lutz Hübner does not speak French. Communication was therefore mostly in German, sometimes in English if the students really did not understand. The questionnaires were filled out in the classroom in German. The French teacher had worked with the students on playwriting and character acting. The English teacher contributed by working on dramatic creations in English. In the sequence that I analyse, the students present Lutz Hübner with the characters they have created using his questionnaire.

The aim here is to triangulate data based on a short extract from a case study, i.e. a student whom I shall call Chelsea, to show the level of correlation between three variables: i) aesthetic experience (first-person data, explicitation interview) and creativity (third-person data: observation protocol and video recording), ii) empathy (explicitation interview, variable *Fantasy Scale* Davis test, observation protocol and video recording) and iii) translanguaging.

Variables according to the three observation components	Sub-variables (resources that students can mobilise, driven by the performative approach)	Indicators (verbalisation of action sequences)
AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE (1 st person) CREATIVITY (3 rd person)	- feel: (emotion, sensoriality, attention, interest, pleasure) - use one’s imagination , engage in the dramatic creation process (acting,	- the students take pleasure in experiencing aesthetic processes (acting) - students are capable, alone or in a group, of giving a verbal form (through acting, orally and/or written) to their imagination

¹⁰ Their play, “Simply the Best,” was mostly written in German/English and featured a scene in which the students, when they rebel, talk in their family languages.

	writing text, thinking “outside the box”, mental agility - surpass oneself (transforming resistance and tension, excitement, lack of inhibition)	- students show a capacity to adapt and transform what they know into something totally new
EMPATHY in the imagination	Be capable of getting into the skin of another character	- students experience their dramatic characters through their physiological attitudes and their emotions and thoughts
TRANS-LANGUAGING	- Call on all language registers , non verbal and verbal - Move from one language to another	

The DAVIS IRI test enables me to compare and specify the perception that Chelsea has of her capacity to resonate with otherness. The scores for the whole class are shown below in pale grey. In dark grey, we can see Chelsea's scores during the same period. We can see that while Chelsea is fairly critical of herself compared to the class average in terms of her capacity to empathise, her highest scores concern her imagination (FS) and sympathy with others, and her feelings of “distress and discomfort in response to extreme distress in others” (PD).

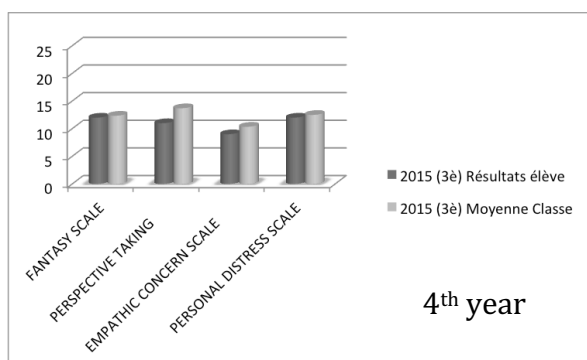


Fig. 3: Davis IRI empathy tests, (1980) in the AiLES study. The case of Chelsea. Excerpt from thesis: Eschenauer, S. (2017, p. 446)

Legend: Score for each scale:

0pts (min) – 28pts (max)

Chelsea:

Year 4: 12 (FS), 11 (PT), 9 (EC), 12 (PD)

In this article I concentrate on one variable in particular, the fantasy scale (FS), which seems to play an important role in the study and for language learning.

The capacity to play a fictional character (FS)

In the 4th year, Chelsea expressed a desire to "give the best of herself" (explicitation interview) in her creative work. This may explain her scores. This variable of the imagination, which Davis (1994) finds does not reveal much, is nonetheless rather important in our approach. It appeals to pupils' creativity in order to develop their ability to use translanguaging (or to translanguage).

When Chelsea creates her character for Lutz (in German), she concentrates on all of the creative and aesthetic aspects required to act out the drama: the character (which will influence the way she walks and holds her head, her various moves across the stage, her

language register), and costume. The character's first name, the sound of it and the positive emotions it evokes, allow her to enter emotionally into the character.

Chelsea: Well, yeah, I thought, 'What name would I like to have instead of mine?' and then I thought, 'Well, Chelsea, I'd like to have had that name, so I'm gonna use it.'

Researcher: And once you have the name, what do you think about then?

Chelsea: I think about the way she is, about Chelsea, what she's like, how she dresses, and speaks, and I think, yeah, that suits her, that's more her thing, and I play her with her own personality, her very own personality (...). Doing a play is going to be a bit harder, I'm going to have to imagine the, um straight¹¹, I mean the... I can't remember what it's called, the surroundings and everything because you're in the studio on the stage, it's going to be difficult but you adapt, you usually adapt pretty fast."

She is the one who brings up this capacity to adapt, to create a story within a story (she has to imagine being *her character* in a *studio*, whereas she will be on a *theatre stage*). During rehearsals, the actors therefore need to imagine the scene of the imagined studio). This mental agility is at work both in the performative/creative processes and in the move from one language to the other, as well as in the ego/allocentric processes involved in empathy. Note in addition that Chelsea imagined this role as she described it in German, but the question of the language never comes up. She only remembers it in terms of her acting. The language is for her a means of the relationship and not the object of learning itself.

Helping each other and emergence

Chelsea, in this sequence, makes several moves towards classmates in difficulty, including Rayan, who only joined the class the previous year and has trouble channelling his energy (he had been expelled from his former school for bad behaviour). Chelsea goes to see him spontaneously. She is often the one who, during German lessons, intervenes if he does not understand the instructions.

Chelsea: After that, I really thought about where I might have been born, if I had brothers and sisters and, yeah, 'cos Rayan and me worked together, that made it easier; he gave me his ideas and I gave him mine and then we put them together. In the end we said we were brother and sister, and that meant at least that, well, we were, I was his sister, he was my brother and then, yeah, we got a whole bunch of ideas going together and it was, it really worked, yeah; once you know it all, you just need to write it down and you've finished.

In this example, we can see a meaning emerging in the joint creation of stories. Writing involves shared imagination. The pupils write in English and German, but the foreign languages don't seem to be a problem to them.

The capacity to engage in a creative process: emotion, imitation

Moving into oral language (in a foreign language) involves the experience of a character that Chelsea wants to portray. This student can be very disruptive in the classroom, dominant and a ringleader of group disorders. She had been difficult with the German teacher in previous years.

German teacher (year 2): I understood that Chelsea enjoyed wielding power and authority. She started being rude to me. (...) She said she hated German. I think that she's someone who has great leadership potential, leading or representing a group. In fact, she was the class

¹¹ She means the set but she cannot remember the technical word.

monitor. But how do you recognise these qualities, which may become major flaws if they're not picked up on?

However, that year, she decided to take part in the work, because she was keen to play her role. Her German learning involved imitating the character that she surpassed to turn herself into the character (performative process).

Chelsea: "We pretend we're on stage because when we're on stage we're not gonna speak or shout, are we, we're gonna be still and keep our mouths shut; and when you're on, then it's your moment, you get the most out of it and then you go back to your place."

Later, Chelsea's imitation saw her take on a teacher's role in the classroom (she helped her classmates) and an actor's role in the theatre workshops (*idem*). In doing so, she moved into learning (testimonials of teachers and actresses).

Capacity for translanguaging

Chelsea, as a student, does not like German, and she makes it known. She often claims to understand nothing. Nevertheless, she is often the one who explains all of the instructions. To understand and to express herself, she uses all language registers. Sometimes, this involves conscious processes:

Chelsea: [Lutz] was talking to us, and he said, in German, that we should... we needed to choose our place and stuff, but we were looking at each other, like: 'What's he talking about? We don't understand, what's he mean?' and all that, and then when he explained it to us, well (...) he said the same thing but he showed us (at the same time) so then we got it.

Sometimes, moving from a language register (including from one language to another) is automatic, and so subconscious. Chelsea moves perfectly from one language to another depending on whom she is talking to. Although she told us she did not like German, she said she loved English. In her interview, she recounted an improvisation moment.

Chelsea: So I goes, ich bin Chelsea and I say, I love, like, RnB and soul dance.

Researcher: And what language do you say that in?

Chelsea: I say it in English. Yeah.

She quotes a sentence in German, and claims she is speaking English. Yet the video clearly shows that her role is in German. However, she likes her character, she likes getting into it, and so she has the feeling that she is speaking in English, the language she likes to sing in, listen to and speak. Like bilingual children, she changes register without realising what she is doing, because it is the meaning of what is happening that is most important to her. Her oral and written output in German has progressed considerably since she got involved in her roles. Her grades climbed in her third and fourth years. She was also the pupil who, throughout her entire secondary school education, sought out the highest number of languages. During activities and shows, she wanted to speak in: French, English, Creole, German, Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish and Tunisian Arabic. It became particularly obvious from her 3rd year onwards that she took an interest in all languages: those used by the institution, her classmates, artists or teachers. In order to speak in each language, she did not hesitate to use translanguaging by relying on gestures, movements through space, and even making up terms that she did not know based on a logic of the language that she had understood.

3.3. Discussion

Obviously, other non-measurable or unmeasured factors played a role in Chelsea's development. Yet her comments seem to confirm how important this project was in her relationship with others and in what she learned. A first analysis of the data leads me to formulate the hypothesis of a triadic relationship: aesthetic experience–empathy–translanguaging (Eschenauer, 2014a). The overall analyses of other case studies are similar whilst showing variables. This statement is coherent with emergentist theories, which also note invariables for the group and individual variability.

I put forward the hypothesis that performance brings about plasticity (rapid self transformation) and linguistic fluidity (rapid movement from a language, from one language to another; use of the non verbal to support the verbal, etc.). The connection between translanguaging and empathy seems to reside precisely in this mental plasticity brought about by performance, which is necessary to move from one language to another, to understand, react, use language, and intrinsic to low- and high-level empathy mechanisms (Davis, 1994).

In terms of the study in question here, a complex empathic movement brings into play different perception-action (Varela, 1989) processes: that of the spectator (pupil) who takes the place of the actor (during performances) to understand her intentions and actions, which themselves allow her to understand what is being verbalised (the text, verbal oral production); that of this same pupil turned actor during drama exercises: by projecting herself into the character she is playing (a mental and physiological act), she distances herself from what constitutes her person to take on the culture of her character. She can work with her movements in space, her attitude, the theatrical amplification of her gestures, movements of body in space, prosody and articulation to express herself “as if” she were another, including speaking another language.

In addition, aesthetic experience, though the mechanisms that it implements, seems to open a sensitive door to all languages and allows pupils to make a link between all of their language repertoires, i.e. they *translanguage* (Aden, 2014b: 53). I therefore put forward the second hypothesis that these processes of “feeling with” (*Mitfühlung*) and “feeling within” the other (*Einfühlung*) allow pupils to access other languages and cultures.

The circuits are retroactive: the mental agility required to move from one language to another could foster creativity and the capacity for empathy.

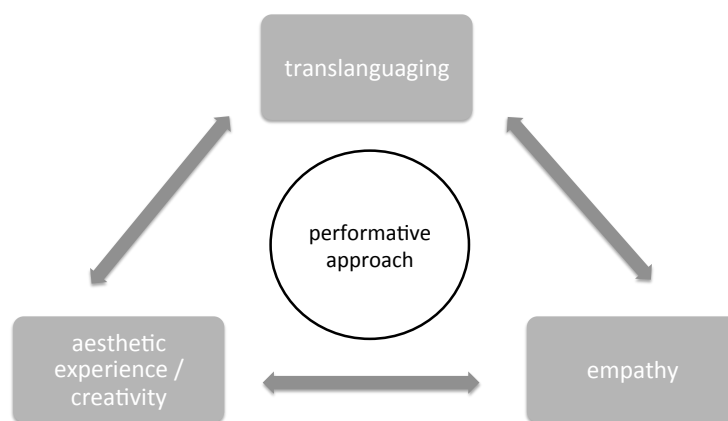


Fig. 4: Triad of effects of a performative approach to teaching languages. Excerpt from thesis. Eschenauer, S. (2017, p. 236)

“The basic idea is therefore that cognitive faculties are inextricably linked to the history of what is experienced, as if a previously inexistent path were to appear when you walk.” (Varela, 1989: 111).

I make the assumption that comparisons with the other data will highlight the variability, which is inherent in the subject’s individuality (relating to transformative processes). These variations logically lead towards

a) Students’ **awareness** of

- their potential as creative learners,
- the richness of their multilingual identity,
- their capacity to develop individual learning strategies,
- the possibilities of collaboration and the importance of connecting to others.

b) The development of cross-disciplinary skills:

- emotional skills, mediating skills (helping each other, translanguaging),
- creative skills (including the capacity to use languages in full autonomy),
- adaptation skills (cognitive flexibility),
- development of the imagination (in all of their languages).

c) The development of **critical thinking** and autonomy, “etymologically ‘self-governance’ rather than ‘independence’” (Trocmé-Fabre, 1999: 37):

- autonomy in *linguaging*,
- behavioural autonomy (decision-making, considered risk-taking),
- capacity for questioning (intra- and intersubjective).

d) **Lack of inhibition**, surpassing oneself.

The first results of this study highlight key factors that are beneficial for the group’s transformative processes:

- The **time factor**: All the students stressed the importance of having prolonged the experiment over the four years, so that they could develop at their own pace and find the right moment for them (*Kairos* in Greek). “I started on the project when I was 11 and I thought it was rubbish, but after a few sessions, I began to think it was good because I was learning faster and didn’t need to stay in class. Now after four years, (...) I have a lot of good memories. The project was fun, pleasurable, full of joy” (Student Zero).
- The **space factor** (reconsider teaching-learning spaces).
- The intervention of **external partners** who encourage students to change their perspective regarding their learning and build connections.

Conclusion:

“These evolutions reshape the sense of belonging inside national or federal borders and call for more flexible and transdisciplinary ways of dealing with plurilingualism. They also require a change of paradigm in language education” (Aden, 2014b).

As Lowie suggests (2016), teaching language firstly requires creating the optimal conditions for learning to occur. In that he concurs with Trocmé-Fabre who continually reminds us that, “no living organism can escape systemic laws, whose aim is to reach and maintain *structural equilibrium*. Pupils, students, teachers, trainers, institutions, companies, etc., constantly have to resolve problems of regulation, adaptation and

evolution. One of the first concepts for educational partners is to understand that ‘we cannot teach anything, we can only provide the conditions for learning’ (Trocmé-Fabre, 2003: 51). Our study highlights the crucial role of the teacher in supporting the student’s learning processes. This does not mean that the classes lack pedagogical objectives or are unplanned on the contrary. But the planning of classes requires sufficient space to be given to emergence, the structural coupling of the interactions of the individual-group-environment. Co-acting, Varela reminds us, is learning.

It is therefore urgent to answer Aden’s call to consider empathy, the mechanism of inter-action and inter-comprehension, as an attitude to develop (rather than a teaching tool) to support students in the act of learning, *a fortiori* in language learning. Then, “[w]e now know that the functioning of our brain is ‘supra’ sensory, that it transcends the information brought to it by the senses. We guess that it truly perceives the essence of things only by resonating with them. Empathy is more than just a mere ‘sixth’ sense” (Lemarquis, 2015: 157).

We also urgently need to take the whole of the student’s identity and plurilingual background on board – that is to say begin with transdisciplinarity - to give meaning to language teaching. “If we are still asking ourselves the same question after [thirty] years, it is no longer valid! Let’s shift our emphasis” (Trocmé-Fabre, 1999: 47).

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