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► **To cite this version:**

Yan-Zhen Chen, Christine Hélot. The Notion of Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence in the Teaching of Foreign Languages in France. *Language Education and Multilingualism – The Langscape Journal*, 2018, *Language Education and Multilingualism*, 1, pp.168-187. hal-02090345

**HAL Id: hal-02090345**

**<https://hal.science/hal-02090345>**

Submitted on 4 Apr 2019

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# The Notion of Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence in the Teaching of Foreign Languages in France

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## Abstract

In this article, we analyze the way the notions of plurilingual repertoire and Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence (henceforth PPC) were interpreted in three foreign language teaching curricula published after 2010 (MENE1526483A, MENE1007260A and MENE1019796A). Our analysis shows that the development of the students' PPC was not as well supported as the development of their linguistic competence in a learned language and therefore the development of students' PPC was treated as a secondary goal. Being an announced but poorly defined objective, the notion of PPC remains unknown and distant to foreign language teachers.

Our analysis is illustrated by empirical data collected from a Chinese as a Foreign Language teacher in a senior high school at Strasbourg. Our data demonstrated the anxiety of the teacher when she had to speak French during her Chinese courses and her constant though unwitting use of English to facilitate her teaching. The strategy of using English was interesting and efficient, but the teacher was not aware of it enough to be able to take a step back and to analyze her pedagogical practices.

With the help of this example, we would like to argue that a better understanding of the meaning and possible pedagogical outcomes of the notion of PPC would help teachers to understand the cognitive benefits of acknowledging their students' previous language competence in all its diversity and to recognize the value of adopting a more ecological approach to language teaching.

**Keywords:** Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence, foreign language teaching, language education policy, French context

## Résumé

Dans cet article, nous avons analysé comment les notions de répertoire plurilingue et compétence plurilingue et pluriculturelle sont interprétées dans trois programmes officiels publiés après 2010 régissant l'enseignement des langues étrangères en France (MENE1526483A, MENE1007260A et MENE1019796A). Nous constatons que la notion de compétence plurilingue et pluriculturelle y a été traitée comme un objectif secondaire, ce qui est notamment manifeste dans le fait que le développement de cette compétence n'est pas autant accompagné que peut l'être le développement des compétences linguistiques. Parce qu'elle consiste en un objectif annoncé mais non étayé, la notion de compétence plurilingue et pluriculturelle reste inconnue et distante pour les praticiens de terrain.

Ce constat est illustré par des données empiriques provenant d'une enseignante de chinois langue étrangère dans un lycée Strasbourgeois. Nos données démontrent l'angoisse de l'enseignante quand elle parle en français dans sa classe puis son recours régulier à l'anglais dans le cadre de son enseignement. Cette utilisation de l'anglais dans la classe est une forme manifeste mais inconsciente de sollicitation du répertoire plurilingue de l'enseignante. Cette sollicitation est d'autant plus

intéressante à observer qu'elle s'avère pertinente et efficace, sans pour autant que l'enseignante ait le recul suffisant pour réfléchir à cette pratique.

Nous soulignons qu'une meilleure compréhension de la notion de compétence plurilingue et pluriculturelle et de ses réalisations possibles dans l'enseignement des langues étrangères peut aider les enseignants à en saisir les bénéfices cognitifs en mettant en avant le répertoire plurilingue des élèves et à en reconnaître la valeur en adoptant une approche plus écologique pour enseigner les langues.

**Mots clés:** compétence plurilingue et pluriculturelle, enseignement des langues étrangères, politiques linguistiques, contexte français.

## Introduction

Following the Barcelona agreement at the European level of 2002 that all European students should learn two additional languages other than their mother tongue, the French Ministry of Education decreed a new curriculum for « Foreign » Language Teaching (henceforth FLT) implementing this measure. Later on in 2010 the curricula included the development of Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence (henceforth PPC) as a goal of FLT (MEN 2010a: 2 & MEN 2010b<sup>1</sup>), and this was restated in 2015 (MEN 2015: 29). This article analyzes the way the notion of PPC is interpreted in the three French FL curricula published since 2010 mentioned above.

We will first discuss how the notion of PPC is elaborated both in research conducted in the field of FL didactics and in three Council of Europe documents: the “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages” (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001), “From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education: Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe” (henceforth *the Guide*, Beacco, 2007) as well as “Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education” (henceforth *the Guide for curricula*, Beacco et al., 2010/2015). Secondly, after a brief introduction of the evolution of French FL curricula, we will analyze the use of the terms “Plurilingual Repertoire”<sup>2</sup> (henceforth PR) and PPC in French FL education policy texts by looking at the context (co-text) where these terms are mentioned. We wish to demonstrate that these notions were used in the curricula without clear explanation. Although it is not for the curricula to explain didactic notions in detail, the way the notions of PR and PPC are used does not inspire FL teacher to envisage their teaching approach differently. We argue that a better understanding of the meaning and possible pedagogical outcomes of the notion of PPC would help teachers to understand the cognitive benefits of acknowledging their students' previous language competence in all its diversity and to recognize the value of adopting a more ecological approach to language teaching. This argumentation will be further illustrated by empirical data collected during 2012-2013 showing that due to the lack of plurilingual education or education to

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<sup>1</sup> On-line document, no pagination: <http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid53320/mene1019796a.html> (retrieved March, 3, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Concerning the PPC as the use and the reorganization of one's PR (for more explanations, see below), we think that the use of the term of PR in the French FL curricula may also be linked to the way the notion of PPC is interpreted in the French FL curricula.

plurilingualism, the Chinese as a FL teacher we observed was not fully aware that her PR was activated and plurilingual resources were mobilized to make her teaching of Chinese more efficient.

## 1. The notion of Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence

Before we continue, we want to explain two central terms: the prefix “pluri-” and the term “competence”. Unlike in English research, in which terms like multilingualism and plurilingualism are used synonymously, in francophone research, the term “multilingualism” is distinguished from the term “plurilingualism”. The former refers to the coexistence of several languages in a society, while the latter is linked to individual lifelong experiences in several languages and cultures (Riley, 2003, p. 8). As Grommes and Hu explained: “the concept of plurilingualism puts the individual at centre stage” (2014, p. 2). As to the term competence, which in French was a legal term (*ex.* an institute is *competent* or not to execute a certain function), it now has multiple meanings according to different scientific domains. Besides the notion of competence elaborated by Chomsky (1965), which refers to the linguistic knowledge (of only one language) that one possesses, the notion of competence in francophone research has been influenced by industrial and organizational psychology before being used in education sciences. Competence is considered as a process of putting resources like declarative and procedural knowledge into practice in a specific problem-solving context (Candelier & Castellotti, 2013, p. 193; Castellotti, 2002, pp. 11-12). In other words, a specific competence is neither the sum nor a collection of knowledge but a dynamic chain of actions. “The interrogated individual interprets the situation in which he/she is involved and chooses a type of response in relation to what he/she judges as relevant and appropriate”<sup>3</sup> (Muller, 2002, p. 77). “Here it refers to freeing the necessary cognitive resources in order to undertake the task in relation to the situations” (Dolz 2002, p. 87). To summarize, the notion of competence is always analyzed with reference to a precise context and clear objectives and observed through an individual’s thinking processes and actions.

### 1.1 The notion of Plurilingual Repertoire

In order to understand how the notion of PPC was elaborated, we need to also discuss the notion of *repertoire*. The notion of *repertoire* was originally elaborated as “verbal repertoire” by Gumperz (1964), who defined it as “the totality of linguistic forms regularly employed in the course of socially significant interaction” (1964, p. 137). This definition was enlarged in 1982 by Gumperz himself and hence included “style” and “genres” in the resource of verbal repertoire (Gumperz 1964, p. 155). Blommaert & Backus (2011, p. 3) considered this update of definition as including cultural knowledge in the notion of repertoire. Later, the notion was taken up in France by Dabène (1994, p. 86) who used the term “communicative repertoire”, which subsequently became “plurilingual repertoire” (cf. Coste 2002, p. 117; Hélot, 2012, pp. 220-221; and Lüdi, 2006) – namely, the totality of linguistic, sociolinguistic, metalinguistic and (socio)cultural knowledge related to a number of languages (and their varieties and registers), mastered at different degrees and for different use, that is available to an individual in an (exolingualistic) communicative and interactive situation. The languages and

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<sup>3</sup> In order to limit the size of this article, we chose to provide directly our translations for the quotations originally in French.

cultures within a repertoire are neither considered as “entities irremediably distinct and separated” (Castellotti & Moore, 2005, p. 108) nor as a list, but as a connected network which can be modified by newly acquired knowledge and the components of which mutually influence each other. According to Busch (2012) and Kramsch (2009; 2006 & 2003), the components of a repertoire exceed cognitive elements and include elements that are more affective and even more abstract as well, such as identity and subjectivity. Therefore, when an individual communicates or interacts in one or several languages and cultures, he/she not only uses his/her linguistic and cultural knowledge, but also experiences emotions provoked by these languages and/or cultures. Thus, the evolution of one’s PR is intimately linked to one’s life choices. Individuals, because of their differences in age, personality, hobbies, capacities, representations and identities, can develop very different PR even though they live in the same society and have had the same type of education. According to Beacco (2005, p. 19), the repertoire “provides building blocks for affiliation to groups which see themselves as having shared cultural features and their own identifying languages. Signaling group affiliation by these means also has the social function of providing a basis for hetero-identifications”. In other words, a PR constructs the identity of an individual (or a community sharing the same languages/cultures) and is also used as basis to identify/categorize others.

### 1.1.1 Plurilingual Repertoire vs. “multi-competence”

The term “competence” in the notion of PPC brings to mind the notion of “multi-competence” proposed by Cook (1991; 1992; 1995; 1996). However, the notion of “multi-competence” is actually more similar to the notion of PR, since the term “competence” here refers to the meaning of competence in generative grammar (Chomsky 1965). Cook elaborated this term in order to refer to “knowledge of both a first language and other languages, that is to say L1 linguistic competence plus L2 interlanguage” (Cook 1995, p. 94) in a second language learner’s “compound state of mind” (Cook 1991, p. 112). He argued that the second language learner’s L1 and L2 are closely tied together and cannot be seen as two separated monolingual systems as most of second language acquisition research had envisaged before (Cook 1992, pp. 585; Cook 1996, pp. 65-66). Cook also stated that a person’s multi-competence is “not a final steady-state of knowledge” (1992, p. 581) and thus has the potential to evolve and to be reshaped by the newly acquired language knowledge.

The main difference between the notion of multi-competence and PR lies in the linguistic conceptualization of the first notion, whereas the second is based on a constructivist understanding which includes cultural and social dimensions alongside the linguistic one.

## 1.2 The notion of Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence

The notion of PPC is, according to Castellotti and Moore (2011, pp. 245-247), inspired by three major sources: John Gumperz’s and Dell Hymes’ (cf. 1964) understanding of ethnography of communication, Jim Cummins’ interdependence or iceberg hypothesis (1991) and the socio-constructivist branch of learning psychology which argues for the construction of knowledge based on known elements to learn unknown elements. Coste, Moore and Zarate (2009, p. 11) defined PPC as following:

Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social actor has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen

as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the social actor may draw.

Thus the notion of PPC means that individuals have resources they can deploy to deal with linguistic and cultural diversity as well as otherness when they wish to communicate in exolingual contexts, to adapt to a multicultural community or engage in an intercultural-interpersonal-relationship, *etc.* Coste, Moore & Zarate (2009) stated that PPC is the single and unique composite competence of a social actor who possesses a PR and has many characteristics. First of all, it is unbalanced and partial (*idem*, p. 11-12, see also Candelier & Castellotti, 2013, p. 189; Castellotti & Moore 2011, p. 244-245). For example, an individual can be more confident in oral production in one language, but more confident in written production in another language; or can be familiar with the culture of a specific community without necessarily being able to speak the language. Given these two characteristics, an individual who does not have advanced mastery of a certain linguistic or cultural knowledge is no longer seen as insufficient with regards to an ideal native speaker, but as someone who has a constructive competence and thus potential to carry out tasks in various domains and situations.

The notion of PPC is also dynamic and evolving (Coste, Moore & Zarate 2009, p. 13, see also Candelier & Castellotti 2013, p. 190; Castellotti & Moore 2011, p. 244-245). It is actually a “two way competence”, which means that it not only enables an individual to communicate and to relate to others (*i.e.* to create output), but it also enables the individual to become more aware of the linguistic and cultural differences between others and him/her and to learn from the input the he/she receives. Therefore, according to Coste, Moore and Zarate (2009, p. 17), the more languages one learns the easier and more efficient it becomes to learn other languages. However, this affirmation questions the learning of a non-European language like Chinese. Of course, nothing prevents an individual from including a language like Chinese in her/his PR, but it is legitimate to ask whether in the case of learning such a distant language (*cf.* Cenoz, 2001, p. 16; Kellerman, 1979), previous knowledge of other languages is an asset or not. This question points to the lack of research on the notion of PPC as it relates to very distant languages (Chen, 2017).

### 1.2.1 Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence vs. Communicative Competence

These two notions are often used together, since the notion of PPC refers to the ability to communicate in several languages and across several cultural contexts. However, Coste, Moore & Zarate (2009, p. 9) underline that the notion of communicative competence implicitly assumes individuals “to be monolingual native speakers, or who are at least regarded as functioning in endolingual communicative situations (*i.e.* communication involving persons deemed to have a mastered, homogenous knowledge of the entire resources of the medium used, namely their first language)”.<sup>4</sup> This is different from the partial and not necessarily balanced characteristics of PPC as mentioned above. Moreover, the notion of communicative competence was developed within a context where “the learner is not explicitly taken into account as a plurilingual subject” (*idem*, p. 9). Besides, the authors also point out that communicative competence, namely “sociolinguistic and pragmatic abilities, knowledge and aptitudes” (*idem*, p. 9), suggests that “learning a language for communication purposes will enable the culture necessary for those purposes to be gleaned along

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<sup>4</sup> See also Byram, 1997: 8.

the way” (idem, p. 10).<sup>5</sup> This is also different from PPC whose function depends on the linguistic and cultural elements stored within the PR, meaning language and its cultural dimension and related social knowledge should be part of the conceptualization of language, language use and language learning.

### 1.2.2 Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence and Intercultural Competence

Castellotti & Moore (2011, p. 243) have emphasized the notion of plurilingual *and* pluricultural competence as one entity and not two distinct forms of competence. However, the terminology is unstable in the various documents we analyzed. Looking at the theoretical notion as it is used in European documents such as the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001), *the Guide* (Beacco, 2007) and *the Guide for Curricula* (Beacco *et al.*, 2010/2015), in the CEFR, PPC is often shortened to “plurilingual competence”, in *the Guide*, (2007, pp. 10, 15, 17, 18, 30, 31, 38, 40, 44, 64, 68, 80, 81, 104, 105, 107, 108) it is sometimes replaced by the term “plurilingualism as a competence” and in the *Guide of Curricula* it is used side by side with “intercultural competence;” in some formulation we also found the expression “plurilingual and intercultural competence” (Beacco *et al.* 2010/2015, pp. 8, 13 15, 18, 39, 40, 48, 51, 53, 56, 74, 83). The last example illustrates an understanding of PPC inclusive of the notion of intercultural competence (cf. Byram 1997; Byram 2003; Hu 2011 & 2012). According to Byram (1997, p. 48), intercultural competence is composed of linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competences as well as the following components:

- “Attitudes (*savoir être*)” (Byram 1997, pp. 34, 50, 58, 73).
- “Knowledge (*savoir*)” (Byram 1997, pp.34, 51, 58, 73 ).
- “Skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*)” (Byram 1997, pp. 34, 52, 61, 73).
- “Skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*)” (Byram 1997, pp. 34, 52, 61, 73).
- “Critical cultural awareness/political education (*savoir s’engager*)” (Byram 1997, pp. 34, 53, 63, 73).

To conclude, given that languages are inseparable from the cultures in which they have evolved (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey 2002; Candelier *et al.* 2012; Castellotti & Moore 2011, p. 243; Hu 2011) and in order to go beyond the ideal monolingual native speaker or the perfectly balanced bilingual models (Castellotti & Moore 2011, p. 243; Gajo 2014, p. 125-126), the notion of PPC has been elaborated to develop the notions of communicative competence and of intercultural competence further. For us, PPC, which is partial, unbalanced, dynamic, evolving, and composite, refers to the use and the management of one’s PR, being constantly renewed and restructured, within a multilingual and multicultural context, whether it is to communicate with others, to express oneself critically or to learn languages or through other languages than the dominant one, yet without silencing one’s competence in that language.

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<sup>5</sup> See also Byram, 1997: 8.



## 2. The notion of Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence in policy texts of French language education

To analyze the way the notion of PPC is understood in the French FL curricula, we will analyze the use of the terms of PR and PPC in what we consider as language education policy texts, by examining the context (co-text) where these notions are mentioned or referred to. Before demonstrating our analysis, we would like to introduce you to the function and the importance of official texts in France.

### 2.1 French foreign language curricula

The three European language policy documents mentioned in the introduction to this article were to have a major impact on French FL education policies. For example, one year after the publication of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001), the framework became the central reference to re-conceptualize the national FL curricula (called *programme* in France, see below for further explanation) for primary and secondary education. A new approach to the notion of competence was proposed using the CEFR descriptive criteria (in the form of “can-do”-statements) and the various levels (from A to C) were integrated in national evaluations. Moreover, the education reform of 2016 made the teaching of a first FL compulsory from the first grade of primary education, the teaching of the second FL begins at grade 1 of secondary education (age 12), and the teaching of a third FL was made optional from grade 5 of secondary education (age 15).

In France, language education policy is decided at the national level and published in official bulletins by the Ministry of Education. There are different types of official texts in official bulletins. In this article, we will concentrate on the texts called “programs,” which constitute the curriculum for each disciplinary subject at each level from pre-school to upper secondary, including FLs and bilingual education. We consider these texts as a corpus of data that can be analyzed to uncover ideologies and representations of language and language teaching.

Before 2010, the curriculum for the teaching of FLs in France was very exhaustive and detailed. Besides the pedagogical goals and the recommended pedagogical approach (in the singular) they also prescribed the linguistic and cultural elements (phonetics, vocabulary, syntax, cultural elements or historical events, *etc.*) to be acquired according to the language classification of FL1, FL2 or FL3. Since 2010, the curricula for FLs have changed completely. On the one hand, they have become more general, no longer provide any detailed pedagogical contents; instead, different social-historical-cultural themes are proposed at different levels in order to encourage a thematic approach in FL teaching.<sup>6</sup> One of the most striking difference is that the guidelines no longer refer to individual languages but encompass the same general objectives for all FLs.

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<sup>6</sup> From age 6 to 9, the themes are “children”, “classroom” and “children’s universe” (*Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale/MEN* 2015, p: 31); from 9 to 12, the themes are “the person and the daily life”, “geographic, historical and cultural points of reference in the acquired languages” and “imaginary” (MEN 2015, p. 133); from 12-15: “languages”, “school and society”, “voyages and migrations”, “encountering other cultures” (MEN 2015, p. 265); from 15-16: “art of living together” (MEN 2010a, p. 5) and, finally, from 16-18: “myths and heroes”, “area/spaces and exchanges”, “places/sites and forms of power” and “the idea of progress” (MEN 2010b, <http://www.education.gouv.fr/pid24426/special-n-9-du-30-septembre-2010.html>, retrieved March, 2, 2018).



On the other hand, the pedagogical goals have become much more precise: each subject, notably the teaching of FLs, is conceptualized in terms of composite competences and their sub-competences and each of these competences is presented in terms of can do statements illustrated with both practical examples and points of reference regarding the development of the competence in question. In other words, the texts stipulate the behavior a teacher should expect from learners in terms of successful acquisition. Regarding the form, the French curriculum for FLs follows closely the principles outlined in the CEFR.<sup>7</sup>

Official texts in France, such as those we have described above, play a central role in the practice of teachers who are supposed to know them and implement them to the letter. Inspectors regularly evaluate teachers in their classrooms to check whether these “programs” are correctly implemented. Professional education courses are also organized to disseminate the new policies as they are decreed. That said, once the curriculum is implemented, teachers are free to choose their own teaching approach or pedagogy as long as the defined learning objectives are reached. In other words, within the strict constraints of the curriculum, teachers are left some degree of autonomy which, however, they often find difficult to negotiate.

## 2.2 Corpus

Due to the evolution of the curricula that we mentioned above, we chose to analyze three curricula published after 2010 to stay coherent. These three curricula deal with the teaching of all FLs from primary level to senior high school, *i.e.* from age 6 to 18. The table below summarizes these texts and the school levels concerned:

Administrative references	Decrees	School level (age)
MEN, 2015: MENE1526483A	Arrêté du 11/09/2015	Cycle of fundamental learning (cycle 2, age 6-9), Cycle of consolidation (cycle 3, age 9-12) and Cycle of in-depth studies (cycle 4, age 12-15)
MEN, 2010a: MENE1007260A	Arrêté du 04/08/2010	<i>Classe de seconde</i> (age 15-16)
MEN, 2010b: MENE1019796A	Arrêté du 07/21/2010	<i>Cycle terminal</i> (age 16-18)

These three curricula represent 5,063 word types out of 63,803 word tokens.<sup>8</sup> The reason why we chose these curricula as our corpus is that they are written data with a continuum of pedagogical

<sup>7</sup> For an example, please see MEN (2015, p. 126-133):

[http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/48/62/7/collegeprogramme-24-12-2015\\_517627.pdf](http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/48/62/7/collegeprogramme-24-12-2015_517627.pdf)

(retrieved March, 2, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Counted by AntConc 3.4.1w2014. Since the curricula n°MENE1526483A (MEN, 2015) addresses all the school subjects including PE classes, mathematics and so on, we did not include the amount of occurrence of the non-linguistic subjects.

logic, and we believe they are representing a form of language education policy (Shohamy, 2006; Spolsky, 2004).

### 2.3 Analysis and Discussion

In order to uncover the interpretation of PPC in French FL curricula, we will analyze the formulations in which PPC and the PR are either mentioned or referred to (*i.e.* with or without the terms PPC or RP being used) in the light of the following hypothesis and research questions:

- First of all, we analyse how the notion of PPC is introduced in the FL curricula. We consider these different criteria as access to the curricula authors' representations of the notion of PPC (cf. 2.3.1).

- Secondly, our analysis also extends to the notion of the PR in the curricula. Since PPC is the management and the use of one's PR, it is interesting to analyze whether the notion of PR is also present in the texts and how it is expressed (cf. 2.3.2).

- Thirdly, we question the relationship between the teaching of different FLs and that of French (since the students' school language/"mother tongue" is part of their PR as well). What place can "non-target" languages have in a FL classroom to allow the development of students' PPC? This analysis (cf. 2.3.3) seems fundamental for us, because without a clear understanding of the meaning of the notion of PPC and its impact on FL pedagogy, we wonder what sense teachers make of the notion and why it is not elaborated at more length in the official texts.

- Finally, since it is emphasized by Coste, Moore & Zarate (2009) that the notion of Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence should be seen as one entity instead of two distinct forms of competence, we would like to question the relation between the teaching of foreign cultures and FLs. If the development of the students' PPC is only envisaged throughout the teaching of FLs and not that of foreign cultures in the curricula, then we may say that the curricula hold a narrow interpretation of PPC, which makes it more difficult to change FL pedagogy (cf. 2.3.4.).

#### 2.3.1 The notion of PPC in the data under analysis

We found only two occurrences of *plurilingual competence* without the term *pluricultural*. One of these occurrences appeared in the Cycle 2 (age 6-9) of primary school, and the other was found in the text for senior high school level. Both of these two excerpts underlined that it is the teacher's responsibility to take student's PPC into account and make use of it.

Excerpt 1      This cycle contributes to put down the foundations of a first development of the students' *plurilingual competence*. (MENE1526483A/MEN, 2015, p. 29 – introduction to the teaching of FLs in Cycle 2, age 6-9. Our translation, our emphasis.)

Excerpt 2 The dialogue between teachers should allow them to take students' *plurilingual competence* into account and to create bridges between languages and this also applies in the case of a third foreign language. (MENE1007260A/MEN, 2010a, p. 2<sup>9</sup> – pedagogical goals for all the FLs and all status, namely FL1, FL2 & FL3. Our translation, our emphasis.)

However, given where and how PPC was mentioned, we may say that this notion is introduced in a disconnected and discontinuous logic. The close analysis of these official texts shows that when the notion of PPC is mentioned, it is never accompanied by any explanation nor illustrated with examples to make it more accessible to teachers. In fact, this notion is more often absent than present, even if indirect references to it can be detected as we will show below (cf. 2.3.3.). As the data showed above, the frequency of the occurrences of PPC is extremely low: 2 occurrences of PPC (in the terms “plurilingual competence”) out of 5,063 word types/63,803 word tokens. Given the fuzzy link between the notion and its meaning, as well as its low frequency, we wonder why there is such reluctance on the part of authors to use the term in a more precise way when the CEFR is considered the new bible of FL teaching. After all, the notion of PPC is clearly explained in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001: 133-135, 168); thus, at least the reference could be given. More importantly, it is central to an understanding of the reasons why teachers need to embrace a new conceptualization of FL teaching – a conceptualization more focused on the learner and his/her various language experiences and competences, rather than on native speaker competence as a goal, a conceptualization moving away from teaching one FL independently of other languages present in the learners' repertoires, and a vision of language learning as dynamic, ever evolving in various contexts and linked to identity and motivation.

Furthermore, as the data showed, the goal of developing PPC was only announced in the programs of the Cycle 2 (age 6-9) and that of the senior high school (age 15-18) levels. The lack of continuity is difficult to understand – how can the goal of developing PPC be fully achieved if the notion of PPC is silenced in FLT from age 10 to 14? FL teachers might not be aware of the existence of this goal.

### 2.3.2 The notion of PR in the data under analysis

In all the 3 curricula, the term “repertoire” (29 occurrences found) was mostly used in its original French semantic meaning, which means a “directory or collection of one's art work (such as songs or sheets music, etc.)”, for example: “a varied repertoire of songs and nursery rhymes” (MEN 2015: 44). Otherwise, it is used to refer to word lists: “an elementary repertoire of words and simple expressions related to concrete particular situations” (idem: 32).

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<sup>9</sup> Also in MENE1019796A/MEN 2010b: unpaginated online document (<http://www.education.gouv.fr/pid24426/special-n-9-du-30-septembre-2010.html>, accessed March, 13, 2018). In fact, the curriculum n°MENE1007260A (MEN 2010a) and that of n°MENE1019796A (MEN 2010b) have several sections that are identical. Therefore, while calculating the frequency of the occurrence, the repeated elements are counted as one.

Strictly speaking, the term “plurilingual repertoire” did not appear once. We found one occurrence of *repertoire* in the curriculum of the teaching of the FLs at Cycle 4 and one occurrence of *linguistic repertoire* in the curriculum of the teaching of the FL3 at senior high school level.

Excerpt 3 Working and reflecting on languages, including French and ancient languages, should contribute to *the development and the transfer of* diverse and well reflected learning and communicative *strategies* that the competences and linguistic, lexical and cultural knowledge mobilize directly. Therefore, in the learning of a second FL or regional language, the student can make use of *the competences developed in the learning of the first FL and in those other languages of his/her repertoire, notably French*, to learn more quickly and to develop a certain degree of autonomy. (MENE1526483A/ MEN 2015, p. 266 – section entitled “establish contacts between languages” in the teaching of FLs in the Cycle 4, age 12-15. Our translation, our emphasis.)

Excerpt 4 The third foreign language offers a chance to everyone to enrich their *linguistic repertoire* within a range of choices that are more diverse and among the languages less often taught as first or second foreign language. (MENE1007260A & MENE1019796A/MEN 2010a & b, p. 7 – introduction to the teaching of the FL3, age 15-18. Our translation, our emphasis.)

The excerpt 3 indicates that the development of a better metalinguistic awareness should contribute to knowledge transfer between languages, and by using the resources in students’ repertoires, the learning of the second FL or the new regional language can be speeded up. First of all, it is interesting to see that the curricula seem to consider metalinguistic awareness as fundamental and helpful to the development of PPC. But could this also mean that the notion of PPC in the curricula is narrowed down to simple linguistic comparison? Secondly, the excerpt does outline the function PPC can have in the learning of a new FL. But why is the term PPC omitted here? Are these simple phrases clear enough for the teacher to understand what it means at a practical level? The excerpt 4 in the curriculum for the teaching of the FL3 at senior high school level explains that the teaching of the FL3 can be an occasion for the students to experience the learning of languages that are more rarely offered as an FL1 or FL2. We will come back to this point below.

To summarize, the notion of PR does not appear in either the curricula for FLT at primary or at senior high level (except for the case of the teaching of FL3). Therefore, the PR was also introduced in a disconnected and discontinuous logic, just like the notion of PPC.

The following excerpts refer to the notion of PR without specifically mentioning the term:

Excerpt 5 The resources that students and teachers possess are not limited to the taught languages: *the languages at home, of the family, of the environment or the regional neighborhood have also their place* just like in the previous cycles, *but with a more reflective approach*. (MENE1526483A/MEN, 2015, pp. 255 – introduction to the teaching of FLs in Cycle 4, age 12-15. Our translation, our emphasis.)

Excerpt 6 The student who undertakes the learning of a third foreign language has often personal interests in this language, determined by *what he/she has acquired at school before*, sometimes by *his/her family history, or by his/her intellectual curiosity*. In any case, these are *positive inputs* that the teacher can make use of. *This knowledge, acquired in or outside of school, has shaped the linguistic and cultural competences that the student can invest in the learning of a third foreign language. However, the transfer of capacities*

*is not automatic. The teacher should make an effort to create or give rise to these links.*  
(MENE1007260A & MENE1019796A/MEN 2010a & b, p. 7: – introduction to the teaching of the FL3. Our translation, our emphasis.)

In excerpt 5, there is a clear acknowledgement of languages spoken at home and different from those learnt at school as not only resources for the learning of school languages but also as having their own space at school. Without further elaboration for teachers on what to do in class with these ‘resources’ and what space they could invest, as well as what it means at a pedagogical level, the text expresses a definite choice on the part of its authors to open up to a more socio-cognitive approach to language teaching. Indeed, this extract shows a focus on learners and teachers as social actors rather than just on languages as objects of study. What is in fact suggested is a more ecological approach to language education which does not separate the learning of a new language from the previous language learning experiences of a student and of teachers as well. But one is left wondering how such lines are interpreted by new teachers who do not necessarily know the theory behind such a statement and the implications of such a different conceptualization of FL teaching for teachers and learners. More specifically acknowledging the linguistic repertoire of students speaking minoritized languages could have a very strong impact on their motivation to learn not only other languages but all school subjects: Giving a ‘space’ to their home language in class would break with the assimilationist tradition of French schools, provide students with an opportunity to see their bilingualism in a positive light, and help them to affirm their identity positively as well. Somehow, we doubt that what is at stake in such a statement is fully understood without a critical analysis of the text. While we are aware it is not the objective of such a policy text to explain in detail to teachers general didactic orientations, a clearer elaboration of the change of perspective would make it easier for teachers to move away from their monolingual *habitus* and their traditional focus on the target language as a linguistic system of forms and functions to be acquired out of context.

What is suggested in excerpt 6 is different from excerpt 5. It is stressed that the choice of a third language can give some affordances to students who would wish to study a language that might be part of their heritage, and that might not have been passed on to them by their parents as mentioned above. Interestingly, nothing is said of all the heritage or regional or migration languages that were forbidden in French schools over several generations (cf. Bouton 1999: 30). Nothing is said either about the limited choice of a third FL that in practice will be offered to learners: while Italian, Russian, Chinese might be offered, Arabic or Portuguese will be very rare not to mention Turkish, unless a school Head shows a strong engagement for the teaching of these languages. It is as if these official texts must demonstrate that linguistic diversity is to be promoted within language education in France, but their formulation as affirmative statements describing learners and their possible motivations do not really question traditional pedagogical approaches. We would like to argue that the use of the term PR in these two excerpts would probably challenge teachers in a more direct way to question their representations of language learning and teaching. Therefore, the absence of the notion of PR in these examples could be considered as the silencing of a central idea meant to transform language pedagogy.

Both of these two extracts have emphasized again that teachers should help students developing their PPC and this requires a reflective approach. This leaves us to wonder what can be the entry point for non-target languages in a FL classroom in France.

### 2.3.3 The relationship between different languages

The new curricula published after 2010, especially that for the primary school level, put a lot of emphasis on the notion of transdisciplinarity. Hence, we found paragraphs entitled “*croisements entre enseignements* (teaching across subjects, our translation)” at the end of each school subject’s section and in this case providing examples illustrating the possible cooperation between different subjects. Consequently, in the directives concerning FL teaching, there are several elements suitable for the category we are about to illustrate. We have selected the following examples because they can significantly demonstrate an evolution of how FL learning can be inspired by the learners’ PPC. With the following examples, we would like to underline that the use of languages (to learn) evolves gradually from a comparative approach based on lexical, syntactical or phonetical differences, to explaining what it means to use all the resources stored in one’s PR to acquire a new language, and it is noticeable that the national language is also included in the proposed approach:

Excerpt 7 The activities in regional and foreign languages are an opportunity to *look at* the target language, French and other languages *together*, to compare the function of the language. (MENE1526483A/MEN 2015, p. 34 – transdisciplinarity of the teaching of FLs in Cycle 2, age 6-9. Our translation, our emphasis.)

Excerpt 8 The learning of a second foreign language [...] can be based on *the knowledge and competences already applied for another foreign or regional language and French. The link between languages* can have diverse forms: *comparison of functions, convergence or differentiation of approaches, transfer of strategies, cultural reflection*, for foreign languages but also for French. (MENE1526483A/MEN 2015, p. 255 – introduction to the teaching of FLs in Cycle 4, age 12-15. Our translation, our emphasis.)

As we can see, excerpt 8 is another indirect evidence for the notion of PPC in the curricula, and it shows that the use of one’s PR takes diverse forms: from metalinguistic comparison and observations of how different languages work to communicative or learning strategies transfer between languages. Indeed, all these examples can be considered as examples of what the notion of PPC can mean. However, these two extracts are not illustrated with concrete example to further explain how a teacher, as a specialist of one FL only, can make use of other languages.

It is also noticeable that the older the students become, the more sophisticated their PPC is expected to be. However, in present day society, more and more children start experiencing cultural diversity at a very young age and are plurilingual and pluricultural even before entering school (cf. Young & Mary 2016; Young 2013). Why, then, does the FL curriculum wait until Cycle 4 to finally provide an explanation of how to support learners’ PPC? Why should the notion of PPC be interpreted in more restrictive terms at primary level?

Besides, given that the terms of PR and PPC are only used in the sections of the curriculum related to the teaching of FLs, as the data has shown so far, this poses a question at primary level where teachers are responsible for all school subjects, thus the French language as well as a FL. The new curriculum would be ideal to propose a more ecological approach to language education including in a more integrated way the teaching of French and the FL. But we know that curriculum designers are influenced by epistemological issues related to different school disciplines. The teaching of the national language has been conceptualized from the start of free education as an instrument for social cohesion, and pedagogical approaches are very normative. Breaking down barriers between the national language and foreign languages would imply a major shift of representations towards

the role and place of languages at school and might put at risk the dominance of the national language.

A good example of this can be seen in the introduction of the overall curriculum of Cycle 4 (age 12-15, MEN 2015, p. 219), where it is explained that the different school subjects can contribute to the mastery of French. In this paragraph, every school subject in the curriculum is mentioned except for FLs. Does this mean that the learning of FLs has neither an effect on nor presents a contribution to one's knowledge of L1? We know from research (cf. Cook 1992, p. 560-561; Cook & Singleton 2014, p. 8-11) that there is evidence warranting that the influence of L1 on L2 and L2 on L1 can be mutual and that it can be beneficial cognitively to make students aware of such transfers.

Analyzing the issue of the relationship between languages also points to the absence of "can-do"-statements specifying the development of PPC in these three curricula. It is interesting to note that "can-do"-statements concerning the teaching of FLs in general are strictly linguistic and relate to the one target language only. Even if we acknowledge that PPC has been envisaged as synonymous with metalinguistic comparison in the curricula, there are no related "can-do"-statements explaining how to develop this kind of competence. In the curricula for the teaching of FLs (for example MEN 2015, p. 266) it is mentioned as a pedagogical goal, but without any further description of how it could be implemented.

Given the gap and the vagueness of interpretation between what should be implemented by teachers (teachers should help developing their students' PPC as required in the curricula) and what students should be able to achieve (the "can-do"-statements in the rest of the curricula have nothing to do with PPC as a goal), we would like to underline that there is very little room for the development of a PPC as defined by researchers mentioned in first part of our paper. Therefore, this leaves teachers with a policy document that proposes a new understanding of language teaching without making clear to them how they can benefit from such theoretical reflection and advance their teaching practice in a more efficient way. Without proposing necessarily a long list of "can-do"-statements, a clearer explanation of the rationale for including PPC as a central notion in one's FL teaching approach could break down some of the barriers between the traditional separation of FLs from one another and from the French language as well.

From the point of view of the learners, it also gives an implicit message that the learners are not expected to be able to manage or make use of their PR. Since every "can-do"-statement in these curricula is strictly linguistic and concerns one target language only, the students are meant to enhance their linguistic knowledge separately in each language without taking other languages into account. In other words, the learners are not educated to deal with difference, alterity and diversity.<sup>10</sup> As Gajo (2014, p. 125) states: "[P]lurilingualism is seen as a goal of education but not clearly as a means to achieving that goal".

We believe such loose interpretation of the notion of PPC is not specific to French FL policy and is also present in European language policy documents such as the CEFR. Indeed, Candelier & Castellotti (2013: 195) point out that:

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<sup>10</sup> We are not assuming that the students would not develop the PPC on their own. We merely try to focus on the analysis regarding the curricula.



It is thus as much paradoxical to notice that the ‘operational’ parts of the CEFR, notably the framework of competences focusing on the learning of languages, do not take into account the capacities more particularly developed in relation to the plurilingual and pluricultural competence.

### 2.3.4 The cultural dimension in language teaching in the curricula

As mentioned above, the teaching methodology to be implemented should adopt a thematic approach through the inclusion of socio-cultural-historical topics. Interestingly, the evaluation criteria in the form of “can-do”-statements are presented separately for the linguistic elements and the cultural ones: the latter concern one target culture only, just like the “can-do”-statements for the linguistic part. In other words, the benefits of social and cultural knowledge, in terms of their contribution to enabling a person to engage, to interpret and to react in a communicative situation, are not taken into account as researchers have argued (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002; Candelier *et al.*, 2012; Castellotti & Moore, 2011, p. 243; Hu, 2011, among others).

As to the “can-do”-statements for the teaching of culture,<sup>11</sup> they were first phrased mainly from a linguistic dimension (for example: “Lexicon: to possess an elementary repertoire of isolated words, simple expressions and cultural elements,”<sup>12</sup> our translation) to finally include, at the level of Cycle 4 (age 12-15), the perspective of cultural *savoir-être* (for example: “to decentre oneself in order to learn about self and others, keep a distance in relation to one’s own references, to go beyond stereotypes,”<sup>13</sup> our translation) and cultural *savoir-faire* (“compare the class and the world outside of the class, while developing some observation methods in order to understand the different points of view and visions of the world,”<sup>14</sup> our translation) along the same lines as what Byram (1997) and Hu (2011) suggested for the model of intercultural communicative competence.

Besides the disconnection of the assessment for the linguistic dimension of FL learning and that of foreign cultures, in the curricula the PPC was neither mentioned in all its possible dimensions, nor in terms of “plurilingual and intercultural competence,” like in *the Guide for curricula* (Beacco *et al.*, 2010/2015). It was shortened to “plurilingual competence” only, therefore silencing the cultural or intercultural dimension.

One of the pedagogical goals claimed in the curricula is to enable students to communicate in at least two languages. To achieve such a goal, (socio-)cultural knowledge is as important as linguistic knowledge. Take the case known as the “Paris syndrome” (cf. Viala *et al.*, 2004), for example, when someone may have knowledge in the French language but may be unfamiliar with the French culture and be stunned by the dominant social rules in place.

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<sup>11</sup> Absent in the program of the Cycle 2 (age 6-9) and that of the senior high school (15-18).

<sup>12</sup> Extracted from the curriculum of FL teaching in Cycle 3 (age 9-12, MEN, 2015, p. 134). As we mentioned above (in 3.2.2.), the term “repertoire” here does not refer to the notion of PR but a simple cultural related word list.

<sup>13</sup> Extracted from the curriculum for FL teaching in Cycle 4 (age 12-15, MEN, 2015, p. 264).

<sup>14</sup> Extracted from the curriculum of FL teaching in Cycle 4 (age 12-15, MEN, 2015: 264).

Admittedly, some cultural themes are introduced in order to structure the teaching of FLs through a thematic approach. Yet, the “can-do”-statements related to cultural learning are so poorly defined (compare to that of the linguistic items) and only reinforced at Cycle 4 (age 12-15) that we have the impression that culture is seen as something that can be automatically acquired while learning languages, a belief Coste, Moore & Zarate (2009) and Byram (1997) have convincingly argued against.

### 3. The notion of Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence in a Chinese as a Third Foreign Language Class

After having examined the notion of PPC in theoretical research and French FL curricula, we would like to share some empirical data of what the notion of the PPC means or can mean to a teacher of Chinese as a third FL. To answer this question, Chen (2017) conducted an ethnographic research<sup>15</sup> in a senior high school in Strasbourg. The class was composed of twenty-two students (from age 15 to 16) all full beginner learners. They all learned English as their FL1 and German or Spanish as their FL2 before learning Chinese. Furthermore, half of the class including the teacher came from bi- or trilingual families.

The data collected during the observations and the interviews in Chen (2017) show that French was considered both by the teacher and the students as an indispensable instruction language, either to explain the course in a more efficient way or to scaffold a conversation conducted in Chinese. Although French had an important function in this class, the teacher still managed to lecture at least 50% of her course in Chinese. However, despite the important amount of time spent in speaking Chinese, the teacher still felt anxious about not speaking “enough” Chinese in her class. We hypothesize that this anxiety may be due to the monolingual *habitus* of French school and the immersion approach that the teacher adopted for her course which is organized as three sessions of only one hour per week.

In addition to French and Chinese, the data also show that other languages in the PR of the teacher and that of the students, such as English and, to a less frequent degree, German or Arabic were solicited in this class without necessarily being noticed by the protagonists. Take the teacher, for example: her use of English was frequent and consistent (from the beginning to the end of the school year). English was not only used as a metalinguistic comparison reference but also as an instruction language to evaluate, encourage or discipline the students. What was interesting is that the teacher was not aware of her use of English and even expressed during the interview that English did not help her to teach at all. The teacher also revealed during the interview that she was not aware of the existence of the notion of PPC in the FLT curriculum and worried that “too many” languages would drag down the students’ progression in Chinese. If the teacher were familiar with the possible pedagogical outcomes of the notion of PPC, she would at least be released from her anxiety and be more confident in adopting a more ecological approach acknowledging students’ PR as well as her own.

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<sup>15</sup> Data collected during 2012-2013, including 26.5 hours of recording of non-participating observation, 22 individual interviews or focus group with the students (10 hours of transcribed audio recording) and 2 individual interviews with the teacher (2 hours of transcribed audio recording).

## 4. Conclusion

In this chapter, we discussed the conceptualization of the notions of Plurilingual Repertoire and Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence, the latter of which is for us, a partial, unbalanced, dynamic, evolving, and two-way composite competence, referring to the use and the management of one's PR, being constantly renewed and restructured, in a multilingual and multicultural context, whether it is to communicate or to learn.

According to the way the terms of PR and PPC are used in the curricula, we can conclude that these notions are, if not empty, simplified and even fragmented – the cultural dimension is extracted out of the original meaning of PPC, and no further explanation deeper than doing metalinguistic comparisons between different languages is given. Therefore, if we believe that these notions are crucial to transform FL pedagogy, we would argue that a clearer presentation of their relevance should be explained for teachers to understand what is at stake in this new approach to FLT. For example, if a student switched from his/her L2 to his/her L3 in an oral examination in L2, should this be sanctioned or accepted as a trace of his/her PPC?

Analyzing how the notions of PR and PPC are used in the curricula and how the teaching of FLs is conceptualized further indicates that the term 'plurilingualism' would also need to be investigated in these official texts. Indeed, how can one understand what a Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence is if the teaching of languages continues to be labeled FL1, FL2 and FL3, in an additive fashion, assuming that learning a third language is separate from learning an FL1 or FL2, that a new process is put in place each time and that there are no links between the different languages and the approaches to their teaching. On the whole, what our analysis has shown is that the strong monolingual *habitus* of French language education policies still has a very powerful impact on representations of 'foreign' language learning. This means that researchers and teacher educators should join their efforts in taking language teachers on new paths such as those of critical pedagogy and social justice and how they relate to linguistic and cultural diversity and therefore FL teaching. Perhaps these wider issues would help teachers embrace new considerations on their role as educators in a wider perspective, offering them the potential to be actors of social change rather than just transmitters of a fixed body of knowledge unrelated to other school disciplines and even to other languages, leaving learners in a sort of limbo where the knowledge acquired at school is disconnected from their own experiences as social actors.

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