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Plurilingual Repertoires in the ESL Classroom: The Case of the European School

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Plurilingual repertoires play a crucial role in the way that English language teaching is structured in the European School of Luxembourg. The very organization of the European School, where students have different first languages, enroll in different language sections.
accordingly, and follow different tracks (see below), contributes to understanding the specific interactional and learning practices that characterize the English as a second language (ESL) classrooms.

**THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL: EUROPEAN VISION OF PLURILINGUALISM**

The first European School was founded in Luxembourg in 1953 “on the initiative of officials of the European Coal and Steel Community, with the support of the Community’s institutions and the Luxembourg Government” (Schola Europaea, 2012a, n.p.). The European School proposes full-cycle schooling from nursery to university entrance, closing the cycle with a European Baccalaureate.

European schools were created to educate the “children of the staff of the European Communities in order to ensure the proper functioning of the European Institutions.” (Schola Europaea, 1994, p. 1).

This is both a continuation of the right of the children to education in their first language after they have left their home countries and an example of cooperation at an educational level between the Member States (initially six) and the European Communities. The collaboration concerns the curricula, the appointment of teachers, school inspection, and the recognition of levels attained. It is a selective school in the sense that its main priorities are the children of employees of European institutions who do not have to pay tuition fees. International students and Luxembourgish children, on the other hand, must pay tuition fees and their enrolment is subject to available spaces in sections and tracks. Every child of an employee of European institutions who goes through a job-related selection process is automatically granted a spot in the European School without having to go through a selection process. The main goals of the European Schools are as follows:

Educated side by side, untroubled from infancy by divisive prejudices, acquainted with all that is great and good in the different cultures, it will be borne in upon them as they mature that they belong together. Without ceasing to look to their own lands with love and pride, they will become in mind Europeans, schooled and ready to complete and consolidate the work of their fathers before them, to bring into being a united and thriving Europe. (Schola Europaea, 2012b)

The European School is described as an “experiment in education, side by side, of children of different mother tongues and nationalities” (Schola Europaea, 2012a). Following the European Union’s ideal that citizens should speak the language of the country they originally come
from and at least two other languages, the European School is organized in language sections. Students’ language sections are determined by their parents’ nationality and first languages. At the secondary level, the European School of Luxembourg offered 12 language sections for the 2012 school year (German, English, French, Spanish, Finnish, Dutch, Polish, Portuguese, Swedish, Danish, Greek, and Italian); not all of the European Union’s 27 Member States have their own language section. If a student’s first language is one that is offered as a section, then the student studies several subjects in that language. If students speak a first language that does not have a section, they are offered language courses in their first language (i.e., language-as-subject), but study all content courses through the medium of other languages.

European School students at the secondary level study their second and third languages, art, music, and physical education in cohorts comprised of mixed nationalities (Schola Europaea, 2012b). History and geography are studied in the students’ first foreign language, called their working language (English, French, or German) from the third grade of secondary school onwards, again in mixed nationality groups, in line with the objectives of the school.

In this context, students inevitably change classrooms and classmates on the hour, according to their schedule, which means that they continuously negotiate and renegotiate the languages they use. The European School is interesting with regards to the development of teaching through the medium of a second language (L2) for two reasons. First, the first languages of the students are an important consideration for the school. Second, students’ other languages and their learning environment are significant as well. This raises questions of the students’ use of plurilingual repertoires.

ENACTING PLURILINGUAL REPERTOIRES IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

The following reflections draw upon a larger data set, which was collected at the European School of Luxembourg (corpus international English [interE]) and documents ESL classroom interactions. The students are between 13 and 14 years old and, according to the European School structure, are studying in Year 4, through the medium of their second language (L2), English. They have studied social sciences in English since the beginning of Year 3. The first language of the teacher is English, and he did his teacher education in Great Britain. He is also proficient in French. The students are plurilingual speakers, with different first languages. They follow different language tracks and meet as a cohort for English.
In the extract below, the students are trying to identify the material used in a piece of furniture and engage in a word search (Brouwer, 2003). One student, Fritz, is in charge of writing the answers down.

Extract fer (interE_EU_07_02_2011_15:01-15:20)

001 Fritz: but what I:$ it,
002 Kosta: it=$ the *thing <<spelling in english>fe>
  *(starts writing something on the table)#1
003 Pedro: [in a(1.0) (if in)
004 Kosta: i think in ch[emistry it=s]  
005 Fritz: [<<german>eisen>]  
     iron
007 Kosta: <<spelling in english>f e>
008 Fritz: yeah it=s <<german>eisen>>  
     iron
009 [<<pp> co[al]
010 Chris: [F F] ion
011 Fritz: it=s coal  
012 Chris: iron;
013 Kosta: *iron;    
  *(points to chris))#2
014 Pedro: iron
015 Kosta: iron
016 Fritz: so we say iron(-)<(rall, writes it down>iron>
017 [1.0]
018 Kosta: i don-t know i *don-t  
  *((shakes his head))
019 Fritz: a:nd
020 Chris: [because in french that=s
021 <<french> *fer>(--) <<spelling in english>f e>  
  *iron

In line 1, Fritz asks the group: “What is it?”, possibly referring to either the name of the object or the material it is made of. In line 2, Kosta takes up the question and offers an answer to the second option, a joking word (like thing or something which can’t be wrong) (Selting & Kern, 2009, p. 2507) as a first candidate. He offers a second option or candidate, fe, and supports this option by the gesture of writing with his finger on the table (Figure 1). In line 5, Kosta offers an account of the symbolic resource used by indicating the context of reference “chemistry.” Fritz offers the next candidate in German, eisen. Both fe and eisen function as “provisional terms,” or terms used as temporary options until the correct option is found and that option is

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1 The audio file of extract fer [iron in French] as well as conventions used for transcription (e.g., capitalization used only for indicating emphasis) can be accessed at http://dica-lab.org/
fixed in writing (Krafft & Dausendschön-Gay, 1999, p. 64). Kosta provides the candidate or option \textit{fe} one more time, which is followed by Fritz’s new candidate, \textit{coal}. In line 10, Chris produces \textit{ion} as candidate, repaired in line 12 into \textit{iron}.

It is important to mention that from line 2 to line 12, which is the entire length of the word search sequence, Kosta either taps one finger on the table or moves his finger over the surface of the table. After Chris produces \textit{iron} in line 12, Kosta supports the candidate through repetition and pointing (Figure 2). Pedro acknowledges the candidate with a repetition, and Fritz initiates a word search pre-closing (“so we say iron”), followed by the action of writing down the fixed term. After Kosta’s embodied claim of insufficient knowledge (i.e., “I don’t know”) (Sert, 2011, p. 134) in line 18, Chris produces an account introduced by \textit{because} and includes the candidate word in French (\textit{fer}) and then the chemistry symbol spelled in English \textit{fe} in lines 20–21.

The \textit{fer} excerpt illustrates the enactment of symbolic (l. 2) and content-sensitive candidates (l. 8 to l. 12), three of the five participants advancing the joint writing process by producing at least one option which draws from multilingual resources. That is, other languages (e.g., Latin, German) as well as other symbolic tools or elements which are available to all the speakers (and can therefore be used as common ground) such as chemistry are brought into play, supported, negotiated, and developed towards the relevant solution in the English classroom.
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ESL CLASSROOM

Two dimensions of drawing on plurilingual repertoires in the ESL classroom are addressed by the example presented above: the role that multilingual resources other than English (Ziegler, Sert, & Durus, 2012) can play in a task in the English classroom, and the role that multimodal resources (here, the gesture when “writing” the element \( Fe \) on the table) play in writing a jointly accomplished written product. At the level of symbolic resources, the analysis shows how shared references are used (e.g., the periodic table, chemistry), which go beyond the ESL language classroom. Interestingly, these symbolic resources come from a science-related area (Siry, Ziegler, & Max, 2012). Nonverbal orientation (pointing, gaze, body orientation) and the enactment of iconic gestures are relevant in the negotiation of provisional candidates, especially since they are recycled in the interaction: “writing” with the finger on the table and ongoing hand movements on the table for the duration of the word search. The use of provisional terms is accompanied and sustained by nonverbal resources (e.g., gaze, gestures, sounds, and tools management).

The data suggest that the use of classroom artifacts (symbolic elements) and writing as a symbolic activity facilitates talk with regard to acquiring the target language. Yet, the inclusion of students’ plurilingual repertoires in how the interactions unfolded also played an active (and significant) role in the writing-in-one-language activity (Ziegler, 2013). The implications of the findings of this study and our ongoing research for ESL professionals and teaching English in a globalized
world are that the resources available to students in their multilingual
and multimodal lived realities need to be carefully managed outside,
but also, importantly, inside the classroom or school setting.

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