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## Plurilingual approaches in teaching materials: A tool for textbook analysis

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### Introduction

Policies of language learning and teaching worldwide are slowly but steadily undergoing a paradigm shift referred to as the 'multi/plurilingual turn' Piccardo & Galante, 2018). At the heart of this paradigm shift lie two interrelated changes in perspective, namely (1) that modern societies are increasingly heterogeneous and multilingual resulting in the coexistence of several languages and language varieties within and across speech communities and (2) that an individual's linguistic knowledge is similarly heterogeneous and not neatly separated into individual language systems. It should rather be understood as an 'integrated plurilingual repertoire, which the speaker can call upon flexibly according to the needs of context' (Piccardo & Galante, 2018, p. 148). This second change in perspective in particular is stressed by stakeholders and academics in the field (e.g., the authors of the CEFR, Council of Europe, 2020) through separating the long-established concept of multilingualism as (1) 'the coexistence of different languages at the social or individual level' (Council of Europe 2020, p. 28) from plurilingualism as (2) 'the dynamic linguistic repertoire of an individual user/learner' (ibid.).<sup>1</sup>

In view of this change in perspective, foreign language (FL) learning and teaching should build on and extend the plurilingual repertoire of individual language learners to prepare them for communication in diverse, multilingual settings. This is advocated in international frameworks for language learning including the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2020) and the Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures (FREPA, Candelier et al., 2012) as well as in several national FL-curricula, such as in Finland and New Zealand or in proposed curriculum reforms, such as in the Netherlands (Ontwikkelteam Engels/MVT, 2019) and Austria (Krumm & Reich, 2011).

Even though language education policy is slowly embracing plurilingualism, 'practical applications in

the language classroom are still uncommon' (Piccardo & Galante, 2018, p. 151). The above-described paradigm shift is not received uncontroversially across contexts. While, for instance, the focus on a specific standard native-speaker norm in FL-learning and teaching has long been controversially discussed in the World Englishes/English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)-debate (e.g. Matsuda, 2003), the extent to which FL-learners and teachers agree with this standpoint is to a great extent dependent on the status of the target language, the culture of FL-teaching and the status of language politics in the respective FL-teaching setting (He & Zhang, 2010; Walkingshaw & Oanh, 2014; Ó Murchadha & Flynn, 2018; Tajedding, Alemi & Pashmforoosh, 2018). In addition to this, studies investigating language teachers' attitudes and practices have shown that even when teachers agree with and even welcome the above-described paradigm shift, they find it difficult to implement plurilingual approaches into their own classroom practice and fall back on traditional 'monolingual approaches' to language teaching (de Angelis, 2011; Van Beuningen & Polišenská, 2019; Haukås, 2016; Heyder & Schädlich, 2014). Several comprehensive approaches to plurilingual education that are applicable to various multilingual learning contexts attempt to close this gap between theory and practice (e.g., Cenoz & Gorter, 2015; Duarte & Günther-Van der Meij, 2018; Hufeisen, 2011a; Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014). These valuable contributions propose methods and learning activities that promote plurilingual approaches in the language classroom and present examples of good practice.

So far, the role that teaching materials can play in these plurilingual approaches to language learning and teaching is not yet widely explored, particularly when it comes to the role of textbooks (although see Hufeisen, 2011b and Kofler et al., 2020 for exceptions). Since FL-teachers in their everyday practice often heavily rely on textbooks (e.g. Andon & Wingate, 2013; Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013; Tomlinson, 2012; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2010; for the Dutch context: Fasoglio et al., 2015), textbooks can play a crucial role and support

<sup>1.</sup> In this article we adhere to this differentiation but acknowledge that many publications in the field of multilingualism and language learning do not make this distinction and refer to both situations as 'multilingualism'.

teachers in adopting a plurilingual perspective. In this article, we present an instrument that enables teachers and developers of teaching materials to reflect on plurilingual approaches in existing textbooks for the FL-classroom. The instrument can also be used for the development of course materials that align with plurilingual approaches. After presenting the rationale behind and set-up of the tool, we demonstrate its use in the analysis of a Dutch textbook for German as a foreign language (GFL). We then discuss the findings of this analysis and evaluate the tool's strengths and weaknesses.

## Plurilingual approaches to foreign language learning

Sierens and Van Avermaet (2014) argue that plurilingual approaches in education should encompass three strategies to respond to modern-day linguistic diversity. Their first strategy concerns the introduction of a constructive and open language policy at school that 'includes all the languages students and their parents speak' (p. 14). While this strategy pertains to schoollife in general, their second and third strategies are more specifically concerned with language education and, hence, also apply to FL-learning. These two strategies form the basis for our analysis instrument.

Strategy two, 'language awareness raising', aims at making learners aware of their own plurilingual repertoire and the plurilingual character of society. Sierens and Van Avermaet argue that such an approach makes students 'receptive to linguistic diversity and [creates] a positive attitude towards all languages' (2014, pp. 16-17.), including linguistic varieties, home languages and foreign languages. While they advocate that language awareness raising should particularly focus on 'the home languages and linguistic varieties already present in the classroom' (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014, p. 17), we would like to argue that FL-teaching can extend this perspective to also include the plurilingual character of societies in countries and regions where the target language is spoken. Thus, students generally learning a standard variant of the foreign language should also be exposed to and made aware of language variation in the target language. An awareness of such intra-linguistic variation concerning the target language also better prepares the learner for real life communication in that language (Canagarajah, 2007). Teaching materials should, hence, show and address the linguistic diversity of the target language including regional, social, stylistic, pragmatic, and/or diachronic variation. Recent FL-teaching paradigms, such as the DACHL principle (D = Deutschland 'Germany', A = Austria, CH = Confoederatio Helvetica 'Switzerland', L = Luxembourg/Liechtenstein, cf. Hägi-Mead et al., 2018) and the World Englishes paradigm (Ali, 2011; Huang, 2019) have already pleaded in that direction.

The third strategy that Sierens and Van Avermaet (2014)

introduce is called 'functional plurilingual learning'. This strategy focuses on the deliberate inclusion and use of the learner's prior linguistic knowledge in learning. For FL-teaching, this means that learners are encouraged to make use of their integrated plurilingual repertoire when learning a foreign language. Teaching materials can promote utilisation of the learners' prior linguistic knowledge (e.g., de Angelis & Jessner, 2012; Ehlich, 2007; Hofer & Jessner, 2016; Hufeisen, 2011b). Especially activities that encourage learners to compare and contrast the FL with other languages support learners to make connections between the languages that they already know or are in the process of learning. Empirical research has shown that such explicit focus on interlinguistic variation has positive effects on learners' proficiency development in the target language (Sierens et al., 2018).

As mentioned above, there has been little systematic research with respect to the role teaching materials can play in fostering plurilingual approaches in FL-teaching materials. This might partly be related to the above discussion on the inclusion of plurilingual approaches in the language classroom; the concept has been addressed to different degrees across different contexts, both in terms of the status of plurilingualism in society as a whole and the FL-curriculum of the country in which the materials are used and with respect to the target language. Most studies, with the exception of Kofler et al. (2020), focus on either one of the two strategies described above. Only a few studies have investigated to what extent course materials expose learners to intra-linguistic diversity (e.g. Geist, 2018; Hu & McKay, 2014; Kofler et al., 2020; Maijala et al., 2016). Geist (2018) includes the analysis criterion 'language awareness raising aspects' which covers the subcategory 'getting familiar with language diversity'. Kofler et al. (2020) and Hu and McKay (2014) find that reference to and activities focusing on intra-linguistic diversity of the target language are scarce and, if at all, often limited to a few words or sentences. By contrast, Maijala et al., (2016) show that Finnish and Dutch teaching materials adopt a plurilingual approach for GFL. This plurilingual approach, however, is restricted to knowledge of cultural trivia, such as greetings, regional dishes and holidays from different Germanspeaking countries and regions. Benschop et al. (2021) confirm the presence of plurilingual awareness raising activities in their analysis of Dutch textbooks for Spanish, English and French.

A more substantial body of research has studied the utilization of prior linguistic knowledge and the incorporation of interlinguistic comparison in FL-teaching materials, i.e. the third strategy identified by Sierens and Van Avermaet (2014). Many of these studies have investigated which languages are drawn upon when making reference to prior linguistic knowledge (Benschop et al., 2021; Flinz, 2018; Haukås, 2017; Jarząbek, 2013; Kofler et al., 2020). A more substantial body of research has studied the utilization of prior linguistic knowledge and the incorporation of interlinguistic comparison in FL-teaching materials, i.e. the third strategy identified by Sierens and Van Avermaet (2014). Many of these studies have investigated which languages are drawn upon when making reference to prior linguistic knowledge (Benschop et al., 2021; Flinz, 2018; Haukås, 2017; Jarzabek, 2013; Kofler et al., 2020). They indicate that, overall, references to other languages are scarce. In most cases, comparisons are made between the target language and English or the language of schooling (Flinz, 2018; Haukås, 2018; Kofler et al., 2020). References to heritage languages rarely occur but have been found to feature in books for learning English and French in primary schools in Switzerland (where heritage languages include Portuguese, Albanian or Turkish, see Kofler et al., 2020, p. 114). Studies further indicate that contrastive exercises mainly focus on vocabulary and to a lesser extent on grammar (Flinz, 2018; Jarzabek, 2013; Kofler et al., 2020). This research indicates that some books explicitly teach the learner how their experience with learning their L1 or a foreign language can support them learning a new foreign language (Flinz, 2018; Kofler et al., 2020; Łyp-Bielecka, 2016), while others pay little attention to this (Haukås, 2017; Jarząbek, 2013). Finally, studies show that German coursebooks for primary education in Germany (see Geist, 2018) and foreign language coursebooks for secondary school in Switzerland (see Kofler et al., 2020), which do feature interlinguistic comparisons, make little use of the reflective potential that reference to learners' prior linguistic knowledge would allow.

## The Plurilingual Approaches in Textbooks (PlATe) tool

To systematically evaluate whether teaching materials align with the above-described plurilingual approaches in FL-learning and teaching, we have developed a tool for textbook analysis. Two questions are central to our tool:

- 1. Do teaching materials address intralinguistic variation and if so how and to what extent?
- 2. Do teaching materials make use of the FL learners' prior linguistic knowledge and incorporate interlinguistic comparison and if so how and to what extent?

The tool comprises three components. First, there is a central grid for the analysis of individual items in the textbook. These items can be exercises, texts (written or audio), tables or figures (e.g., in a grammar overview). To answer the two central questions related to (1) intralinguistic variation and (2) prior linguistic knowledge and interlinguistic comparison, all items that appear to involve one of the two approaches are identified and analyzed. Items that involve intralinguistic variation are differentiated according to the type of variation they address (i.e., regional, diachronic, register and other variation). For items that involve prior linguistic knowledge and interlinguistic comparison, the grid registers which and how many languages are involved and whether these languages are the language of schooling, the target language, regional variants of the target language, another foreign language taught at school, a heritage language, or other languages. In order to detect what type of knowledge the items under investigation foster, PlATe determines whether an individual item fosters declarative knowledge, language use or reflection. To provide the full picture, the analysis of each item also registers where it is found (i.e., part of the textbook series, page number, exercise number), the item's topic (e.g., history, tourism, etc.), its linguistic domain (e.g., lexicon, morpho-syntax, pronunciation, etc.), the learner activity, the instruction type (i.e., deductive, inductive, implicit and explicit, see Marx, 2014) and exercise type following the subclassification of Maijala and Tammenga-Helmantel (2019). In addition to this central analysis grid, we have two additional analysis grids to register loose vocabulary and grammar items displaying intra- and interlinguistic variation.

PlATe provides a detailed picture of intra- and interlinguistic variation found in teaching materials. As such, it enhances Kofler et al.'s (2017) analysis grid in that it refines the description of intra- and interlinguistic variation in exercises and provides more information about the exercises' objectives (knowledge, use, reflection), scope (theme, linguistic domain) and pedagogy (inductive, deductive etc.).

### Sample analysis of ZugSpitze

In the following, we demonstrate the use of PlATe by analyzing *ZugSpitze*, a Dutch GFL course book series published in 2018 by ThiemeMeulenhoff. *ZugSpitze* consists of six course books from CEFR level A1 to A2+ level. The books are used in the first three years at Dutch secondary schools. The students are between 12 and 15 years of age.

Each volume in the series covers reading and listening materials, grammar and vocabulary overviews, and exercises. The books are structured as follows: they start with an introduction to the volume's topic, which is always a city, region, or country in a German-speaking area (e.g., Austria, Berlin), followed by *Schritte* (i.e., learning 'steps'). Each step focuses on a skill with a specific learning outcome (e.g., writing: *You are able to write simple sentences about yourself and other people*). Exercises, learning tips and vocabulary overviews support the learner to achieve this learning outcome. Whether or not the learners succeeded is tested at the end of each step.

PIATe (Plurilingual Approaches to Teaching Materials) - Central analysis grid Location in textbook - part of the textbook series (eg. coursebook, workbook, etc.) - page and exercise number Type of plurilingual intralingual variation type of variety/-ies involved approach - regional - diachronic - register - other interlingual variation type of language/-s involved - language of schooling - target language (TL) - regional variations of TL - other FL offered at school - heritage language - other Level of knowledge - Knowledge (declarative knowledge, eg. finding out facts about languages/varieties) - Use (procedural knowledge, eg. learning to apply linguistic knowledge) - Reflection (reflective knowledge, eg. reflecting on languages or language varieties) Topic What is the topic of the text/activity (eg. leisure, language situation in Switzland etc.)? Linguistic domain - Phonetics/Phonology Morphology - Syntax - Pragmatics - Semantics Lexicon Learner activity What is the learner supposed to do in the activity (eg. reading a text, discussion with peer etc.) Didactic method - implicit (ie. without rule formation) (cf. Marx, 2014) - explicit (ie. with rule formation) - deductive (ie. rule given to learner) - inductive (ie. rule explored by lerner) Exercise type - Choose-the-correct-answer - Fill-in-the-blanks (cf. Maijala & Tammenga-Helmantel, - Written exercises 2019) Communicative oral exercises - Grammar games - Translation exercises - Reflective/analytical exercises - Revision exercises

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Table 1. Central analysis grid

After completing approximately four to seven steps – this varies from volume to volume – the learners can review and test what they have learned in those steps. A final section allows the learners to revise. Every volume concludes with overviews of vocabulary,

grammar, and pronunciation.

The first and second author independently analyzed volume 1 of *ZugSpitze* using PlATe. Volumes 2-6 were analyzed by the second author and a random

sub-sample was additionally analyzed by the first author. Both analyses were highly comparable to each other. The second and fourth authors established the vocabulary lists in cooperation. In the following, we will present our findings using PIATe as our analysis tool.

# Does *ZugSpitze* expose the learner to intralinguistic variation?

The analysis of individual items using PlATe's central analysis grid, indicated that exposure to intralinguistic variation is fairly common in *ZugSpitze*. Apart from volume 1, one 'step' in each volume covers a German language variant.

In volume 2, this is the Berlin dialect (the *Berliner Schnauze*). The learners are offered one vocabulary translation exercise (p. 11) using the *Berliner Schnauze* implicitly raising their knowledge about this regional variant of German. Learners must guess what, for example, the dialect words *icke* (Standard German: *ich*) and *Juuten Abent* (Standard German: *Guten Abend*) mean.

Volume 3 includes three exercises with the standard variant of German spoken in Austria. The first two exercises focus on lexical knowledge. The learners match Austrian vocabulary to the standard German forms (e.g., Austrian: *Erdäpfel* – German: *Kartoffeln*, 'potatoes') and subsequently listen to a song and translate the Austrian words into Dutch (e.g., Austrian: *nimma* – Dutch: *nooit*, 'never'). In the third exercise, learners listen to a dialogue and answer true/false-questions of which some are related to lexical and pragmatic knowledge (e.g., '*Uma viere bedeutet um* 16:00 Uhr – "Uma viere' means at 4pm').

The topic of volume 4 is Switzerland. There are three exercises comparing standard German and standard Swiss German tapping into the learners' explicit lexical knowledge of regional and standard variants. Learners are asked to read a text and either answer questions or match words with their translations (e.g., Swiss German: *Glacé* – German: *Eis*, 'ice cream').

Lexical information on the standard variant spoken in Liechtenstein is presented in volume 5. Learners listen to a song, answer multiple choice questions, and look for standard Liechtenstein vocabulary equivalents to some standard German words (e.g., Liechtenstein: *müad* – German: *müde*, 'tired').

Volume 6 covers Luxembourg. The first two exercises refer to explicit lexical knowledge of the regional variant; the learners combine pictures to words and standard Luxembourgish sentences to their standard German translations (e.g. Luxembourgish: *Dat as flott!* – German: *Das ist toll!*, 'That's cool!'). The second

exercise includes vocabulary and phonology; a table shows how Luxembourgish vowels are pronounced referring to the pronunciation of Dutch vowels (e.g.  $\ddot{e}$ and *eu*), and, thus, touches upon use and reflection as well. The third exercise is a mini quiz with a multiplechoice question focusing on lexical knowledge of Luxembourgish (What does Luxembourgish: *Äddi a merci* mean? – answer: German: *Tschüs und danke!*, 'Goodbye and thank you!').

In the overarching analysis of vocabulary items that cover intralinguistic variation, 24 occurrences of linguistic variation were identified. 16 are from standard variants of German associated with different regions (e.g., Grüezi from Swiss-German, alles paletti from colloquial German, Wiesnwirte from Bavarian/ Austrian-German). Seven words are either colloquial or stylistic/register variations (e.g, Kripo, short for Kriminalpolizei, 'criminal police' and Kumpel, 'mate'), one of these is an acronym (i.e, Hdsl, for Hab dich so lieb 'love you so much'). Three are explanations of the words' etymological origins: Brezeln ('pretzels'), the name Luxembourg (from Lucilinburhuc/Lützelburg, 'little castle'), and the German news broadcast for children, Logo, a creative name based on the word logisch ('logical').

To conclude, *ZugSpitze* focuses on intralinguistic comparisons; each volume presents one of the many regional standard variants of German. Generally, the learners are presented with regional vocabulary in the texts throughout the volume and can practise with standard regional vocabulary in the exercises.

# Does *ZugSpitze* incorporate and make use of the learners' prior linguistic knowledge?

Our analysis of the involvement of prior linguistic knowledge and interlinguistic comparison brought to light that, throughout all six volumes, only one exercise refers to knowledge that learners have of languages other than German. This exercise is in volume 2 (p. 15) and explains the pronunciation of the German consonants [g] and [l] by comparing them to their pronunciation in Dutch and English. It is explained that [g] is pronounced as in the English word garden and that the [l] in German is 'thinner' than in Dutch. Learners listen to a recording of some examples and then pronounce them themselves, first individually and later in pairs. Subsequently, they compare the Dutch and German pronunciation of these consonants based on a list of examples. This exercise taps into the learners' knowledge and use of other languages, but while there is comparison, no explicit reflection is required. Other than that, we came across one pronunciation exercise in volume 1 (p. 24) in which interlinguistic comparison could easily be added

to contribute to learners' crosslinguistic language awareness: the learners practise the pronunciation of several German words with a vowel chart. By comparing this vowel chart with the vowel chart of other languages, for instance, Dutch and/or English, learners could easily compare and contrast the pronunciation of German vowels to their Dutch and/or English counterparts.

The grammar overviews include four different comparisons between Dutch and German. There is one orthographic comparison, namely, that in contrast to Dutch, German capitalizes nouns. The three other comparisons are at the morphological level. First, learners are taught that when a Dutch noun takes the neuter gender (definite article: *het*), its German equivalent is also often a neuter noun (definite article: *das*). Second, it is mentioned that Dutch also displays some relics of genitive case, when explaining the German case system. Third, it is explained that although singular is possible, German generally opts for plural *manche Kinder* 'some children', just like Dutch. No exercises are directly linked to this information.

Nine vocabulary items from a foreign language were found across the entire textbook. All of these were English loanwords (e.g., *channel, follower, likes*). Most examples illustrate the use of language in social media, i.e. register/style variations and might, thus, be considered both instances of intralinguistic and interlinguistic variation.

We conclude that *ZugSpitze* offers very little explicit opportunity for learners to use their prior linguistic knowledge. With one exercise and nine foreign vocabulary items in six volumes, references to familiar languages are fairly limited.

### Discussion and conclusion

The few studies that investigated the inclusion of intralinguistic variation in teaching materials generally found that there is little attention to regional differences of the target language (Hu & McKay, 2014; Kofler et al., 2020). In ZugSpitze, however, there is regular exposure to intralinguistic variation: one 'step' with several exercises dedicated to either dialects or standard regional variants of German is included in every volume, apart from volume 1. In addition, 24 occurrences of mostly regional and colloquial vocabulary are counted. This seems to indicate that it is a conscious choice of the authors to include this in their teaching materials. Although not explicitly stated as a goal by the authors, they raise the learner's awareness of the pluricentricity of the German language and, additionally, prepare the learners for real-life communication in the target language, for instance on their vacation in Austria. However, little of the information that is provided on intralinguistic variation goes beyond the level of

knowledge. Exercises that foster the use and reflection on these instances of variation in a more explicit manner would be valuable additions.

The utilization of the learners' prior linguistic knowledge remains fairly limited in *ZugSpitze*; the grammar overview provides some comparisons between German and Dutch, but nothing was found in exercises. These results are in line with several previous studies (Flinz, 2018; Haukås, 2017; Kofler et al., 2020) that showed that references to other languages are scarce. It remains unclear why so few explicit comparisons to Dutch are made given the typological closeness of the two languages. This might be related to the textbook's objective to foster target language use; using German as much as possible has resulted in the avoidance of references to Dutch.

Piloting PIATe on Zugspitze has shown it to be an appropriate instrument to systematically explore the plurilingual perspective in teaching materials. The tool allowed us to get a detailed picture of concrete instances that foster language awareness, both in terms of intra- and interlinguistic variation. However, our analysis also revealed some shortcomings of the tool. During our analysis, we realized that the list of exercise types that was taken from Maijala and Tammenga-Helmantel (2019) did not fit our analysis as well as we had hoped. This might be related to the fact that their classification was for grammar exercises. Future analyses using PIATe should, hence, attempt a revision of the exercise type classification. Moreover, we consider it desirable to include quantitative measures in our analysis grid. This would enable a comparison between teaching materials.

PlATe is intended to support foreign language teachers and developers of teaching materials. Teachers are provided with an extra lens to critically look at teaching materials; it helps when selecting new or alternative course books that align with a plurilingual approach. Additionally, publishing houses can use the tool when developing these materials. These challenges are by no means exclusively Dutch, and neither is PlATe. Its functioning was demonstrated for a Dutch GFL course book, but its application is neither restricted to this foreign language nor to the Dutch teaching context. Nevertheless, using PIATe in another linguistic context might require some adaptations so that the analysis is according to the language landscape. Researchers from other linguistic contexts are invited to pilot PlATe and give us feedback. It would also be interesting to compare local and global teaching materials. Analyses could explore whether local teaching materials exploit the advantage they supposedly have over global course books in that they consider the prior linguistic knowledge of the local learners.

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