

Rethinking Language Awareness in the Context of Plurilingual Education – a Study across Educational Levels in Denmark

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Abstract

The article presents an interim operationalization on language awareness in the context of plurilingual education developed in the PE-LAL project's initial phases. The operationalization consists of two models. The first model conceptualizes plurilingual education based on the *Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures* and further develops this framework by concretizing how students' first languages can be taken into account in the three pluralistic approaches to languages. The second model conceptualizes language awareness distinguishing between three dimensions of language awareness that can be directed towards nine language levels and one transversal language learning dimension. The operationalization is a result of the project's abductive approach: initially, it is developed deductively on the basis of previous research and conceptualizations and then further adapted inductively on the basis of empirical findings from a curriculum analysis. In the next phases of the project, the operationalization will be further developed based on empirical findings from a classroom case study.

1. Introduction

The project *Plurilingual Education – Minority and Majority Students' Language Awareness across Educational Levels* (PE-LAL), a three-year project financed by The Independent Research Fund Denmark from 2020-2023, seeks to compare students' development of language awareness (LA) in the context of plurilingual education across educational levels and hereby contribute to further theoretisation of the field of knowledge. Furthermore, the PE-LAL project aims to develop plurilingual education in the Danish educational context.

The purpose of the article is to present the PE-LAL project's preliminary conceptualization of LA in the context of plurilingual education as it stands halfway through the project period. The article is structured as follows. First, it describes the research questions, hypotheses, and design of the PE-LAL project. Then, it presents a preliminary operationalization of LA in the context of plurilingual education as a result of the first two phases of the project. Finally, it outlines the project's next steps and further development of the operationalization.

2. The PE-LAL project: research questions, hypotheses and design

The PE-LAL project seeks to examine how students' language awareness can be conceptualized in the context of plurilingual education across educational levels. The project explores LA in grade 1, 5, 7, and 9 (primary and lower secondary school) and in grade 11 in the preparatory three-months cross-curricular course *Almen Sprogforståelse* ('General Language Awareness', upper secondary school). Thus, the project covers a range from age 7 to age 17.

The project's overall research question is addressed through the following three subordinated research questions:

RQ 1. How are LA, plurilingual education and first languages beyond Danish integrated in and across the curriculum for language subjects in primary and lower secondary education and the curriculum for *Almen Sprogforståelse* in upper secondary education?

RQ 2. How does the students' LA manifest itself in the context of plurilingual education in primary and lower secondary education and in *Almen Sprogforståelse* in upper secondary education?

RQ 3. How is LA expressed and reflected in group interviews with students in primary and secondary education, whose teaching was based on plurilingual education?

The project's main hypotheses are that LA, given that the educational context represents exemplary practices, (a) can be developed by students at all educational levels through plurilingual education, (b) manifests itself and can be communicated by the individual learners in response to pedagogical strategies, revealing similarities and differences in respect to the learners' age and linguistic resources, (c) can be conceptualized based on systematic empirical research, (d) is not taken sufficiently into account in the Danish curriculum from a cross-curricular, cross-level and learner-centered perspective, where first languages beyond the language(s) of schooling are recognized.

The project consists of four phases: an initial theoretical phase, two empirical phases, and a final dissemination phase. Figure 1 provides an overview on the project's design and timeline.

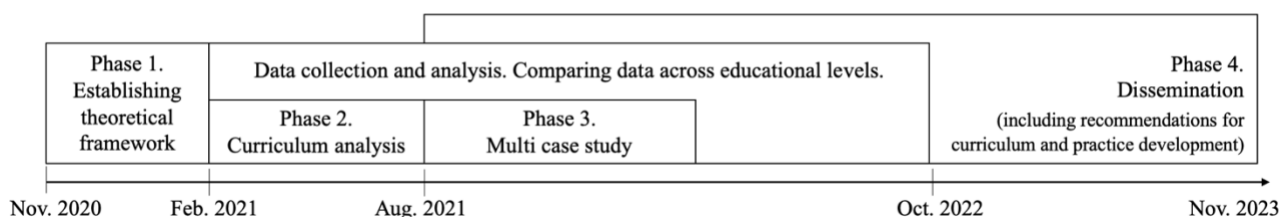


Figure 1. Design and timeline for the PE-LAL project

The following preliminary operationalization of LA in the context of plurilingual education is a result of the project's first and second phase. By drawing on an abductive approach (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), the operationalization is developed based on a synthesis of (1) research literature and existing conceptualizations in the field and (2) empirical findings from the project's curriculum analysis. Thus, the operationalization is both theoretically and empirically based.

3. The operationalization

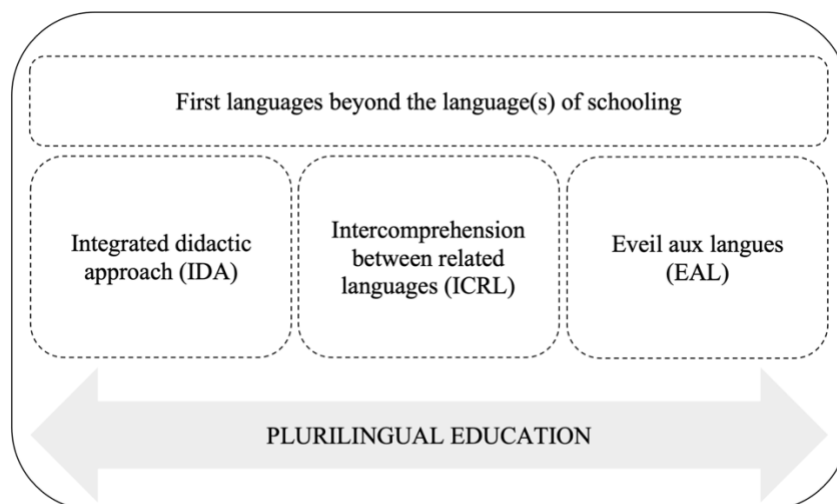
This section presents the preliminary conceptualization of LA in the context of plurilingual education. The operationalization consists of two models. The models are described separately but

should be seen in relation to each other: the model of plurilingual education forms the context for the model of LA being the object of study.

3.1 Model of plurilingual education

To define plurilingual education, the project draws on Candelier et al.'s (2010) *Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures* (FREPA). In the FREPA, pluralistic approaches are described as didactic approaches using “teaching/learning activities involving several (i.e. more than one) varieties of languages or cultures” (Candelier et al., 2010, 8) in contrast to singular approaches that take “account of only one language or a particular culture, considered in isolation” (ibid., in a Danish context see also Daryai-Hansen, 2012, 2018a, 2018b; Daryai-Hansen, Drachmann & Holmen, 2018; Drachmann, 2017, 2018, 2022).

Based on Candelier et al. (2010), model 1 shows how plurilingual education reflects a continuum by including three pluralistic approaches to languages, adding a transversal dimension focusing on first languages beyond the language(s) of schooling.



Model 1. Model of plurilingual education

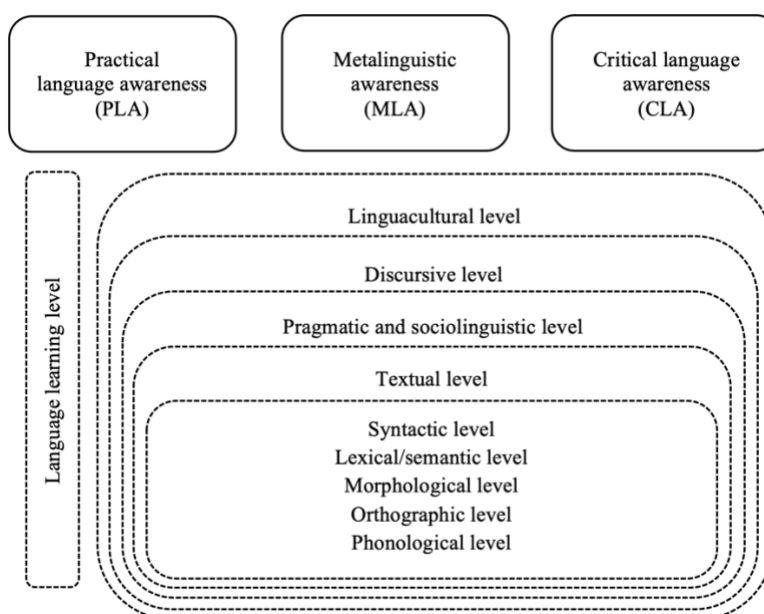
The first approach, *integrated didactic approach to different languages studied* (IDA), creates transitions between languages in the school curriculum or in individual learning spaces between languages known by the students (Daryai-Hansen, 2018a, 2018b). The aim of IDA is to strengthen the students’ communicative competence in the target language as the students’ already acquired language(s) are used as a springboard to learn a new one. The second approach, *intercomprehension between related languages* (ICRL), creates transitions between languages from the same linguistic family e.g., between Germanic languages or Romance languages. The aim of ICRL is primarily to strengthen the students’ receptive competences by exploring the transparency between the related languages studied in parallel. The third approach, *Eveil aux langues* (eng. *Awakening to languages*), creates transitions between a wide range of languages and linguistic varieties represented in the classroom, in society or in the world, e.g., global languages, classic languages, modern foreign language, minority languages, dialects, sociolects etc. The aim of EAL is to strengthen the students’ LA and sensitivity to language diversity by developing the students’ cross-linguistic competence and their *Sprachbildung* (Reich & Krumm, 2013, see Drachmann 2017, 2018, 2022).

The transversal dimension focuses on other first language than the language(s) of schooling, in a Danish context meaning first languages beyond Danish. The transversal dimension is an integrated part of the three pluralistic approaches: In IDA, the students' first language(s) are languages taught in school, or first language(s) that the students work on individually or in groups of students having the same first language. In ICRL, the students' first language(s) are one of the two or more languages of the same linguistic family that all students in class work on. In EAL, the students' first language(s) are integrated into activities that all students in class work on. The model is a theoretical abstraction, and the dotted lines indicate that the boundaries between the pluralistic approaches and the transversal dimension are fluid. In a Danish context e.g., comparisons between German and Danish are an example of IDA as both languages are represented in the school's curricula, but it could be argued also to be an example of ICRL as German and Danish are related Germanic languages.

3.2. Model of LA

According to van Lier (1998, 2004), a distinction can be made between the concepts *consciousness* and *awareness* (van Lier 1998, 136; 2004, 98, 102). In the PE-LAL project, we choose to focus on the concept of *language awareness* (see Daryai-Hansen & Krogager Andersen, in progress).

Based on van Lier (1998, 2004, see in a Danish context: Krogager Andersen, 2020) and a further development of an operationalization presented in Drachmann (2017, 2018), Daryai-Hansen (2018a), Daryai-Hansen, Drachmann & Meidell-Sigsgaard (2019), model 2 distinguishes between three different dimensions of LA directed towards nine language levels and/or through a transversal language learning level.



Model 2. Model of language awareness

The first dimension, *practical language awareness* (PLA), is defined as intuitive, immediate, and spontaneous linguistic practices expressed by acting through or engaging with language, e.g., by making experimental linguistic innovations, imitating others, using language in a creative or imaginative way, or through impulsive language production (see Clark, 1978; Gombert, 1992;

Krogager Andersen, 2020; Waller, 1986). PLA may be expressed verbally or non-verbally, e.g., through drawings, body expressions or body language. The second dimension, *metalinguistic awareness* (MLA), is defined as linguistic practices focusing on language at a metalevel by explicit reflecting or commenting on and talking about language, e.g., by using everyday language or metalanguage, or through metalinguistic analysis with or without using formal academic metalanguage (see Bialystok, 2001; Clark, 1978; Gombert, 1992; Simard & Gutierrez, 2018; Waller, 1986). MLA may be expressed verbally or non-verbally, e.g., through body expressions and body language. The third dimension, *critical language awareness* (CLA), is defined as linguistic practices involving a critical perspective on language and language use, e.g., by examining, discussing or being critical of the relationship between language and power, linguistic norms, or language ideologies (Alim, 2010; Fairclough, 1992; Clark et al., 1990, 1991; van Lier, 1998, 2004; Wallace, 1999, 2018). CLA practices may be expressed verbally (in a simple or abstract way) or non-verbally, e.g., through facial expressions, gestures, or body language.

Common for the three dimensions are that they can be directed towards eight language levels, covering the complex language system (see also Drachmann (2017, 2018), Daryai-Hansen (2018a), Daryai-Hansen, Drachmann & Meidell-Sigsgaard, 2019; Doughty & Williams 1998; Gombert, 1992; Moore, 2014) going from the smallest parts of language (sound) to the largest part (discourse). In addition, and as a result of the project's abductive approach, model 2 also includes a ninth language level, the *linguacultural level* (Agar, 1995) as a key finding in the curriculum analysis was that language often is linked to culture (see Daryai-Hansen & Krogager Andersen, in progress; Drachmann, forthcoming). The dotted lines in model 2 indicate that LA can be directed towards more than one language level at the same time as upper language levels often include lower language levels.

Also, common for the three dimensions are that they can be expressed as an awareness of language learning (Candelier et al., 2010; Haukås, 2018), illustrated through a transversal language learning level. When LA is manifested as language learning, it will often also be directed towards one or more of the nine language levels.

4. Next steps

So far, the operationalization has been used as the conceptual framework for the PE-LAL project's curriculum analysis in phase two. In the project's third phase, the operationalization is first used as basis for developing teaching materials for an exemplary plurilingual education forming the context for the case study. Then, the next step is to analyse the collected case study data on the basis of the operationalization but also to explore whether the collected data reveal dimensions of LA that the operationalization does not take into account. By comparing the empirical case study findings across grade 1, 5, 7, 9 and 11, the operationalization will be adapted and further developed so that the final version of the operationalization provides a theoretical and empirical conceptualisation of students' development of LA in the context of plurilingual education across educational levels.

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