

**Code-Switching in the Middle School EF Classes: The Case Study
of the First Year Learners
Must it be perceived as an asset to ease or as a constraint to
obstruct Foreign Language Learning? ⁽¹⁾**

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Abstract: The present paper deals with the role of the mother tongue (MT) and other languages and dialects in first year English classes in the Algerian context. Through the analysis of a series of recorded lectures and the study of the code switching instances, we have attempted to highlight the role and identify the main functions of the MT, i.e., Arabic, and other languages, during the implementation of the curricula contents.

Keys-words: Code switching, multilingualism, interlanguage, socio-constructivism, interculturality.

الملخص باللغة العربية

تتناول هذه المقالة دور اللغة الأم وغيرها من اللغات في التواصل بين تلاميذ قسم السنة الأولى متوسط. حاولنا على أساس التحليل لسلسلة من الدروس المسجلة ومن خلال دراسة الاقتراض اللغوي، تسليط الضوء على دور والتعرف على الوظائف الأساسية للغة الأم أي اللغة العربية و اللغات الأخرى أثناء التنفيذ للمحتوى التعليمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاقتراض اللغوي - متعدد اللغات - بين اللغات - بناء اجتماعي - بين الثقافات

Introduction

The present contribution is to report a study on language use, namely Arabic and other languages in the Algerian middle school English class. It focuses on the observation, the description and the interpretation of the users' linguistic behaviours, namely the teacher and learners, in the classroom space, and more specifically

1 - EFL: English as a Foreign Language / ELL: English Language Learning /
FL1: Foreign Language 1 / FL2: Foreign Language 2 / L: Learner / Ls: Learners /
MT: Mother Tongue / T: Teacher / TIE: Technological Institute of Education /
TL: Target Language.

the shift from English, the target FL, to Arabic (MT)⁽²⁾ and the French language (FL1), i.e., code switching, during the English course. The research field of the present investigation relates to a place of learning by excellence, as the interactions occur in the classroom. We propose to observe how the interaction is being built within the classroom space (social environment) where “the knows”, “the know-how-to do” and “how-to be” circulate, and thereby generating changes of language teaching and learning. It should be emphasized that the objective behind this study is twofold; namely teaching and learning. For the first, the didactic analysis is at the crossroads of several subjects: linguistics, enunciation theory, conversational analysis and communication ethnography. Thus, class observation analysis and transcription allow knowledge improvement on the procedures for the transmission of knows and skills of the teacher’s professional behaviour, on one side, and learners’ learning abilities, on the other one. For the second goal, this analysis could be revealing, in respect of the teaching/learning process and the discursive phenomenon that may remain covert.

I. The Goal of Learning English as a Foreign Language

It is recognized that behind every teaching/learning activity aims and objectives are defined and documented, first, in official instructions and in syllabi developed by the Educational Authority, and, then, transcribed and laid out by experts in textbooks that are the main support for the implementation of these activities.

I.1. Aims:

According to the official documents, the purpose underpinning English Language Learning (ELL) is as follows: “*The first year program of English as a second FL is meant for the acquisition of language skills, cultural and methodological bases that will enable learners to use English as a communication tool, facilitating access to effective documentation*”(MEN 2003: 72)

I.2. First Year Exit Profile

The introduction of a second foreign language at this level of the middle school is, therefore, based on the previous achievements in teaching/learning the foreign language. Learning it will be against the capability of receiving and producing of learning at this age. The exit profile of the first year is as follows:

2 - The MT, in the Algerian context, is a mixture of dialects and languages used by Algerian speakers to communicate in real life situations (vivo).

The learner must be able to:

“Clearly differentiate the sounds of language (simple sounds and diphthongs);

be sensitive to stress, intonation of the English language; listen and understand a simple message; Speak and be understood in a simple but correct English; Write a coherent paragraph from simple offered items.” (Ibid)

II. The FL Class at the Crossroads of the Languages

The issue of code switching and language alternation, major manifestation of language contact, continues to preoccupy researchers trying to understand, analyze and describe situations of multilingualism. The present research has had an impact on pedagogical theory by the fact that communication in the classroom is considered as a particular type of social interaction. The teaching/learning of languages gives rise, too, to interactions that are multilingual where, face-to-face, learners and teachers practise different languages and stylistic varieties. The classroom should therefore be regarded as the meeting place of different linguistic repertoires that characterise both the learners and the teachers. Researches, conducted in recent years, have shown that language learning is taking place frequently, as opposed to code switching principle long advocated by the teaching of languages, only in the target language. We will focus on this essential aspect of the educational interaction in the analysis of the sequences of courses in middle school, i.e., an educational setting that sets a target to lay the linguistic knowledge. It is usually in middle school, observation and guidance cycle, that learners acquire knowledge in connection with the target language in its threefold aspects: linguistic, methodological and cultural .

English is far from being the only spoken language in the classroom especially at the beginning of EFL learning. In fact, the use of the mother tongue (MT) and other languages as learners' linguistic prerequisites is systematic. Prior to condemning without appeal, the use of language or other languages, in a course normally devoted to/reserved for English language learning, is worth having a closer look at specific situations of 'useful' code switching. The use of language, assuredly, varies according to the type of course.

III. Code Switching

Some researchers take over the Anglo-Saxon terminology and use "code switching" (a term coined by E. Haugen since 1956), code

switching or code mixing, others use the concepts of learning French as code switching (used in Speech translation of Gumperz 1982) alternating codes (Hamers and Blanc 1983:176), alternating languages (Gradner-chloros 1985). This plethora of terminology reflects the lack of linguists' agreement to determine the mixed discourse of language interference or borrowing. According to Hamers and Blanc:

“code-switching is a communication strategy used by bilingual speakers among them; this strategy consists of alternating units of different lengths from two or more codes within the same verbal interaction” (1983: 176).

The foreign language learner uses the language already acquired, uses her/his multilingualism to build her/his knowledge and establish a solid basis to accommodate new knowledge. Thus, mastering the native or another language is essential to successfully construct a solid foundation that enables the acquisition of the foreign language. However, the alternation is an imperative shift for the learner. This alternation is defined by J.-P. Cuq as:

“The change, made by a bilingual speaker, of language or language variety within one-sentence statement or an exchange, or between two communication situations.” (2003:17-18).

This is a set of phenomena and complex and systematic behaviours that may be analyzed at different levels:

III. 1. Psycholinguistics and Language

Code switching is seen as evidence of the processes of production and reception in bilingualism, and its study would provide the researcher with access to the grammar of the bilingualism. It is often regarded as a mental and/or linguistic confusion, layout transitions between two grammars which can require sophisticated skills.

III.2. Communication and Interaction

Code switching is a communication strategy, a resource that allows the speaker to express a wide range of functions and attitudes: bridging or bypassing gaps or problems in its two varieties, marking the thematic discursive units or asserting its own identity, including or excluding the interlocutor with a social group, redefining a situation, being humorous, and so on.

III.3. Sociolinguistics

The alternating mirror practice marks the boundaries between structures, institutions and social groups, relationships

and discontinuities between linguistic communities and the social reality of their members.

It is often not possible to clearly distinguish between code switching, borrowing and lexical assimilation, mixing languages or mixed languages⁽³⁾.

Learning a foreign language through the mother tongue pushes the learner to think about their language and develop, thanks to it, the ability to analyse other languages, facilitating foreign language learning (FLL).

However, within the general educational framework of foreign language teaching, the learning strategies are subject to several competing theories, notably that of whether to resort to the learner's mother tongue or not. Indeed, some believe that the use of MT prevents the learner from entering the thought patterns of the FL. While others believe that "the linguistic comparison is an essential process of learning strategy and reflection development for the FL Learner." (Yanaprasart, 2005:177-196).

Surveys conducted in the FL classes have the merit to lead to a better understanding of teachers' practices such as the recourse to the MT: the grammar lesson in MT as well as the translation of the lexical items may become the norm, especially as researches in the field have revalorized the role of MT for the learner. For example, according to Giacobbe (1990:123), the MT is not an obstacle to FL learning, but "one of the foundations of the new system that the learner builds up." Even if the MT is the source of appropriation, the contact with the FL is obviously indispensable. It enables the learner to work his auditory comprehension, it provides him with an opportunity to explore the linguistic data, that is to say, to issue and then test hypotheses on the system of the target language.

III.4. Making sense of the alternation between the two languages

Among the adepts of the whole interaction in FL (Coste 1997) and the advocators of the support on the MT and other languages,

3 - Mixed languages: created vehicular languages, called mixed languages of type 2. It is the prompt creation of idiom that will be used only in the situation where his need arises. This means that it is not the language of any of either party. Most frequently, this language is obtained by integrating elements of both varieties in presence (or two ... advantage) in a structure whose main feature is simplicity. The mixture is generally not fair: the variety of the strongest group often dominates. (Klinkenberg, 1999:73)

the issue of the role and the place of LM and other languages in the FL classes continues to fuel a profound debate between, on the one hand, the conception of learning facilitated by the contact with the target language that is acquired on the model of the child's acquisition of his native language⁽⁴⁾, and, on the other hand, the one which advocates the use of MT and for which the gaps between learning in both languages are not only taken into account, but more importantly, they serve as a cornerstone in building new skills.

The teacher has at his disposal the strategies to limit the use of the MT. It is; therefore, appropriate to reflect on the potential contribution of using the MT and other languages on the grounds of learning criteria, and to give some answers to the questions that are currently about language teaching possibilities to introduce a "rational alternation" in FL classes (Dabène, 1994).

IV. The Corpus

Communicative competency is the first skill meant by FLL. This learning process is based primarily on oral skill from which one learns both to "communicate" and to communicate in FL. The language, thus, becomes both the means and the purpose.

Our corpus consists of a set of recorded products of middle school learners. We note that these learners start learning English in the first year by means of "*instructing a newly designed syllabus for FLL founded on speech production and communication.*" (MEN 2002). An effective communication requires being able to express ideas and views clearly, confidently and concisely in speech, tailoring the content and style to the audience and promoting free-flowing communication.

According to the official guidelines, the objectives behind the ELL for the first year learners of the middle school focus on oral communication. The learner must acquire the necessary elements for the oral language, but s/he does not reach a high level in

4 - At present, the official guidelines in many countries recommend that lessons be planned to be as monolingual as possible, drawing on the mother tongue only when difficulties arise. A consensus has been reached in favour of a kind of monolingualism with small concessions: "There is little point in trying to stamp it out completely" (Harmer, 2001: 132). The mother tongue is generally regarded as being an evasive man oeuvre which is only to be used in emergencies. Effective bilingual teaching techniques are, therefore, as good as unknown in schools. It looks as though the so-called direct method, now operating under the new banner of the communicative approach, has triumphed.

writing. In other words, acquiring the process by which the learner attains the capacity to perceive and comprehend the language, as well as to produce and use words and sentences to communicate.

IV.1. The Target Population

The group of learners, targeted by this study is, supposedly, homogenous: students of the same age between 11 and 12, approximately of the same level, who have followed the same curriculum, but whose cultural and socio-psychological differences are strongly present. These are external factors to which much importance should be attached to the study of learner's verbal interactions. Indeed, the learner population has just started learning English as a FL2, and has no assets in their prior knowledge on the target language (TL). Enrolled for five years now, this population has learned the MT since birth and French as FL1 for 3 years. The choice of this population of learners lies in the fact that it is the cohort of the transitional phase between the awakening cycle (primary school education) and the observation and orientation cycle (middle school education). All learners are monolingual. They are all native speakers of the classical Arabic language with all its diversity: national and regional Arabic dialects, and as FL1 the French language. Learning a foreign language means acquiring a new linguistic competency that must be added to the prerequisite of the native language; shared by the subjects of the same community.

IV.2. The Field Research

This research uses as investigative field first year learners of the state school who are distributed between rural and urban areas in the wilaya of Mostaganem.

We have tried to describe and analyze the functioning of the English class in middle school in order to identify potential uses of various linguistic resources possibly the mother tongue with all its diversity alongside with the French language. Around this observation, these issues were raised:

- What do the Algerian official instructions require with regard to English language teaching?
- What is the role of alternating languages that constitute a linguistic capital for the learners?
- What didactisation and what teaching methods are implemented in this multilingual and multicultural context?
- To answer these questions, we posed the following objectives:

- To identify the role of LM and other languages in teaching and learning a second foreign language, namely English;
- To understand the various educational functions of languages present in the Algerian context;
- To compare the official instructions and the actual practices in the EF classes.

In order to carry out this work, we solicited the collaboration of two teachers. In fact, four class observations, two at the very beginning of the first term and the two others at the end, were recorded. It should be pointed out that in order to reduce the intruders' influence, though eliminating it entirely can never be reached, I did not attend the sessions meant for the research work. The class observations enable us to pay close attention to the teachers' strategies concerning the learners' first contact with the FL2 (English).

V. EL class observation Analysis

Class Observation 1:

They are learners of Doctor Benzerdjeb middle school formerly Voltaire, located in the urban area (Mostaganem coastal city), and deemed to parents as well as the guardianship for its excellent results. The class functions in a large group of 30 students (20 girls and 10 boys). The teacher, Y. B., former trainee of Mostaganem TIE⁽⁵⁾, has a professional experience of almost 17 years.

Extract 1: The lesson took place at the very beginning of the school year. It covers learners' familiarisation with school tools.

The lesson

T: Bonjour!

Ls: Bonjour, Madam!

T: Y a-t-il des absents? Is there any absentee?

L: No, madam.

T: Okey! look! (*teacher shows the learners a pen.*)

Ls: Stylo, Madam!

T: En anglais on dit: "*a pen*". Répétez "*it is a pen.*"

Ls: Choral repetition

T: Puis! ça? (*Showing a ruler*)

Ls: une règle!

T: "A ruler". It's a ruler.

Ls: It is a ruler.

etc.,

We notice that most exchanges are initiated by the teacher. She is the hub of the communicative process in the classroom as long as she manages its dynamics and organisation.

We also note, in this first extract from the first English course, that French is used as a regulation medium of the activity on familiarizing learners with the tools of the class. The teacher and learners use French in that moment of introduction of the course and it is the teacher herself who initiates the exchange in that language (1) even if she reformulates the question in English (3). Of course, the teacher relies on learners' prior knowledge and the spelling, lexical and graphic similarities between the two systems, FL1 and FL2 so as to facilitate the acquisition of the latter. Stimulating the existing knowledge amongst learners is of a capital interest in connecting cognitive schemata of both foreign languages.

According to Canadian researches cited by Jones and Seguin M.C. Tréville (1993), the results obtained in the aftermath of a computerised counting of two bilingual dictionaries considered representative of basic vocabulary (Robert-Collins, 1978) and (Larousse Saturne, 1981) provide us with some useful indications. A list of 23,160 pairs of transparent words (6447 pairs of homographs (exactly the same e.g.: table / table) and 16,713 pairs of parographs (just a different letter, two or more, for instance, visitor / visiteur) has been established. Aware that the French glossary contains about 60,000 words, we are struck by the fact that transparent words represent nearly the third of this glossary.

The teacher and learners rely on the similarities between the systems of the two foreign languages and thereby exploiting the transfer phenomena from one to another to facilitate its acquisition. It is therefore quite useful to resort to the language which facilitates and accelerates the acquisition of new FL.

The mother tongue, which is Arabic, plays no role of mediation in these preliminary exchanges. The two interlocutors, namely the teacher and pupils, do not grant 'value' to it to learn English. The reasons may be manifold: educational, psychological and economic.

A. Didactic Reasons

Foreign language learning is inevitably influenced by the habits and patterns relating to the mother tongue, that the latter is or is not taught in school. Much emphasis was placed on the interference phenomena that occur from one language to another,

but it should be remembered that habits related to MT could prove beneficial when -by means of parallelism game- they make the FL2 acquisition easier. The teacher can, then, rely on the similarities of the two systems and thus exploit the transfer phenomena from one language to another, even if he must strive to reduce interference. It is quite possible- for example in reading- starting from letters and letter assemblies already known by the learners to ease and speed up the deciphering mastery in a different language of instruction.

B. Psychological Reasons

Experience shows that the MT, the case of the classical Arabic in the Algerian context, does not always receive the importance it deserves, but it is generally confirmed in a lower status by the system itself since it plays no role in teacher's and learner's everyday life. The MT (classical Arabic), thus, gradually takes to learners an inferior social value comparatively to that which languages of wide international circulation such as English and French enjoy. Linguistic conflicts easily degenerate into psychological conflicts because the language usage more or less official implies a permanent reference to a range of intellectual, moral and emotional extra-linguistic values. Imperceptibly, the child gets used to marking derogatory coefficient to everything related to the original linguistic heritage. The establishment of a converging and complementary methodology is likely to remedy the learner's profound disarray by substituting the interdependence and equality relationships to false hierarchy or confrontation ones. Seeking effective coordination in the learning process helps to create non-confrontational, dynamic and attractive educational multilingualism which limits or even eliminates all forms of alienation.

C. Economic Reasons

Within overcrowded classes, the sad reality of the Algerian context, the teacher feels a great difficulty in dealing with the whole syllabus and implementing differentiated instruction. Thus, the pedagogical research convergence and language learning construction save valuable time by allowing the teacher to avoid repetition and limit rehearsals that become unavoidable since each instruction is in isolation. Some already-acquired learning outcomes in the first language can be transferred unchanged to second language approach. The ability to decipher, for instance, refers to a competence that is acquired once and for all. The learner who

has attained this apprenticeship via the MT or the FL will have no difficulty transferring his technique in another language and, once the mechanisms are in place, reinvestment is systematic.

Extract 2: Towards the end of the first term with the same learners. The lesson deals with practice rubric: numbers and alphabet.

1. T: Good morning!
2. Ls: Good morning!
3. T: Who is absent?
4. Ls: *Personne!*
5. T: What is the date of today?
6. L1: Wednesday, 16th December, 2012
7. T: *orders Nariman to write the date*
8. L2: *(Nariman jotted up the date)*
9. T: Who can count from 1 to 30?
10. L3: 1, 2, 3.....
11. T: The alphabet?
12. Ls: *(Madam, madam hands raised)*
13. T: Vas-y !
14. L4 : a,b,c,d,e,f, etc.
15. T : Okey ! Je vais écrire des chiffres et c'est à vous de trouver les lettres qui correspondent pour écrire des phrases. Est-ce clair ?
16. Ls: Oui madame! Euh! Yes.
17. T: Jotted up the following numbers:
 1. 9-20 /13-25/ 18-21-12- 5 -18/.
 2. 20-1-20/ 9-19/ 8-9-19/19-1-20-3-8-5-12. etc,*(10 minutes later)*
18. T: Okey! Stop now. *Qui peut me donner la première phrase ?*
19. L5: It is my ruler.
20. T: Good. *Ecrit la sur le tableau.*
21. L6: That is his satchel.
22. T: Good! *Ecrit la sur le tableau!* etc.....

In this second extract, which is quite different from the first, we observe a significant reduction of the use of FL1. The teacher uses FL1 to explain the instructions of the activity (15 T). We notice that learners have acquired some linguistic resources that enable them to construct simple utterances. The teacher had to comply with official instructions which stipulate that care must be devoted to further reduction of other languages interference.

Class observation 2

This time, it is another population of learners in a middle school located in a rural area. Ahmed Kadi intermediate school at Sidi Lakhdar, a seaside town with agricultural and animal husbandry vocation, obtains poor results in both English and French compared to other subjects. The class group consists of 40 students (15 girls and 25 boys). The teacher, K.B., a graduate of the University of Mostaganem, has been doing this profession for 8 years.

Excerpt 3: The lesson deals with preliminary contact with necessary school tools. The teacher tries to familiarise learners with the names of

The teacher enters the classroom

1. T : Good morning (in Arabic)
2. Ls: Good morning madam (in Arabic)
3. T : sticks pictures on the chalkboard without saying a word

She points at picture 1 with a ruler.

4. Ls: /kɪ'tɑ:b/ (in Arabic)
5. T: A book (repeats the teacher)
6. Ls: A book (choral repetition)
7. T: points at picture 2
8. Ls: /mɪm'hɑ:t/ (in Arabic)
9. T: A rubber (repeats the teacher)
10. Ls.: A rubber (choral repetition) etc...

Contrary to what we observed in the previous sample extracts, the teacher's/ learners' exchanges involve the MT and the FL2. The dynamics of exchange is based on the teacher's gesture and learners' responses in MT. The responses, in TM, demonstrate learners' deficit in FL1. The novice teacher attempts to apply scrupulously the official instructions which formerly repressed the use of languages other than the target one.

But inevitably, the code-switching proves to be very advantageous for such a large class group. In fact, it stands as an efficient way to gain time and effort that can be reinvested in the benefit of other laborious and substantial activities.

With reference to observation above, we notice that the teacher had to take account in her instructional approach, the learners' multilingualism in the process of teaching/ learning of the FL2.

Excerpt 4: Towards the end of the first term with the same group of learners. The session is devoted to 'practice rubric' dealing with letters and words reordering.

The teacher comes into the classroom.

1. T: Good morning
2. Ls: Good morning
3. T: (*instructs the learners in Arabic*)

Activity 1: Reorder the letters to write correct words

- y/c/a/t/i/d/n/o/i/r/
- g/s/o/b/l/h/o/c/a/
- s/e/p/n/
- k/s/s/d/e
- a/c/p/e/s/n/e

Few minutes later

4. T: Correction (*in Arabic*)
5. L1 : Madam
6. T : Ok!
7. L1 : Dictionary (*mispronounced*)
8. T : *Corrects the learner's pronunciation /dɪkʃənri/*
9. L1 : *repeats*
10. T : *Jots the word up on the chalkboard*
11. L1 : *go to the board (instructs in Arabic)* etc...

Activity two: *rearrange the words to write sentences (instructs them in Arabic)*

- Arabic/ a/ that/ of/ is/ book.
- is/ a/ ruler/ this/ plastic
- two/ in/ there/ copybooks/ schoolbag/ the/ are
 - pencase/ are/ red/ two/ pens/ a white/ pencil/ there/a/ ruler/ blue/ and/ a/ rubber/ in/ the

12. T: *Let's correct (instructed in Arabic)*
13. Ls: *Madam, madam / hands raised*
14. L1: *That is a book of Arabic. (distorted pronunciation)*
15. T: *Corrects and asks the learner to repeat*
16. L1: *Repeats the sentence*
17. Ls: *Madam, madam, hands raised*
18. L2: *This is a ruler plastic.*
19. T: *we don't say "ruler plastic" but "plastic ruler".*
20. T: *orders the learner to repeat the sentence*
21. L2: *This is a plastic ruler.* etc...

In this excerpt, as in the previous one, we notice that the teacher uses the MT to instruct the learners. Much emphasis is put on pronunciation accuracy by the teacher. It is clear that the syntactic dissimilarities between the MT and the FL2 play a negative role in learners' oral and written productions. The

interference of the MT is evidenced in the sentence “It is a rule plastic.” The positioning of the adjective “plastic” is copied onto the Arabic or French model.

The teacher’s role is crucial for learners’ awareness on linguistic, syntactic and other discrepancies that may exist between MT and FL2. In this way, she should ensure a double focusing, internal⁽⁶⁾ and external⁽⁷⁾, as shown by Deyrich:

“Focus generates, consequently, a complexity of identifying knowledge: those that are monopolised for understanding and producing in FL2, those for understanding the FL2 functioning; knowledge in the language and knowledge about the language.” (2007:10).

Resorting to the contrastive theory can assist learners and enlighten them on the functioning of the two linguistic systems in their theoretical forms (knowledge on the language) and their practical ones (know-how-to-do). Ensures proper mastery of the FL2 as Deyrich highlights it hereafter:

“[...] requires skills as well in the know-how-to-do (four language receptive and productive skills) as theoretical knowledge (knows on the language). Indeed, to reach a certain intersubjective efficiency (so that the message reaches its goal) a production, whether written or oral, must be issued according to ‘standards’ (lexical, syntactical, prosodic for spoken language, etc...) (ibid. 2007:10).

Obviously, the teacher’s expertise is vital in selecting the *“appropriate guidance and didactical planning strategies to facilitate both the learning and reinvestment of the learned language forms.” (ibid.).*

Conclusion

Surveys conducted in English classes have the merit to lead to a better understanding of the teachers’ practices. We note that in both cases, learners benefitted from the contributions of their prior learning either in FL1 (French) for learners of Benzerdjeb middle school or in MT (Arabic language) for learners of Kadi middle

6 - Internal focus : The metalinguistic perspective which focuses on the description of the system (to speak the language)

7 - External focus: the instrumental perspective in which language is used as a tool in the interaction or in the transmission of contents that are not language (to speak in language).

school. The learners' linguistic environment affects the practice of foreign language teaching and learning.

It should be noted that the learners' use of FL1, in the first case, is due to the linguistic similarity between the two languages and the mastery of the linguistic, phonological, and graphic systems thereof. The mastery of different systems, no doubt, facilitates and accelerates the acquisition of LE2. This is what might explain the good results that the learners obtain in the different foreign languages assessments. Certainly, other extra school factors play a role in FL1 learners' learning: newspapers, family member interaction in French, mass media, etc. The extracurricular context provides these learners with a multitude of opportunities for informal exposure to FL1. Indeed, much of this learning takes place without a teacher and unconsciously. It has been observed that the "*FL1 learning is relatively carried out in an informal way, through unplanned imitation and its use in real communication situations.*" (Ferguson, 1962: 6). We cannot afford to ignore these "informal", "unguided" or "natural" language learning. Furthermore, the role of extracurricular context was often minimized or ignored in the current researches of foreign language acquisition mainly in the Anglo-Saxon researches (see Stern 1983, Ellis 1987 and more recently, Tarone 1997, 2000, Gajo & Mondada 2000).

However, for the second group of learners, the MT (Arabic) is the language of support for the acquisition of the FL2 (English). Although it differs syntactically, phonologically and morphologically from the FL2, the MT remains the language that allows its acquisition. Certainly, the acquisition process would take much more time compared to the first group of learners, but the MT is an undeniable contribution to the FL2 acquisition.

This implies that an FL learner cannot be considered as a "beginner" who starts from scratch (*tabula rasa*) since s/he already possesses linguistic, communicative and cultural skills (either curricular or extra-curricular) that s/he can reinvest in learning another language. In any case, what s/he will learn is to expand her/his already acquired multilingual skills.

Monolingual lessons without the help of the mother tongue or any other mastered language are extrinsically possible; however, monolingual learning is an intrinsic impossibility. No one can simply turn off what he already knows. We postulate that the mother tongue is "silently" present in FL beginners, even if the lessons are kept monolingual. In fact, teachers can banish the MT or FL1 from

the classroom, but they can never banish it from the learners' heads.

The FL teaching has, for a long time, been done through the communicative approach which aims at the development of the four fundamental interrelated basic skills (oral and written comprehension and production) and which now devotes great space to the intercultural dimension. The languages alternation is also a very important component of this multilingual intercultural communicative approach, which also considers that "mistake" or, to put it more rigorously, the groping, are part of the learning process.

Thus, the newly designed English textbooks, for the Algerian middle school learners, integrate learners' multilingual dimension. Indeed, in the first textbook "*Spotlight on English1*", an English/French bilingual glossary is offered at the end of the textbook so as to enhance learners' awareness of the common linguistic and cultural heritage.

By browsing through the official documents of the Ministry of National Education (2003), we noticed that the guidelines are clearly founded on socio-constructivist methodologies, targeting at communicative skill development.

It is essential, in an interlanguage perspective⁽⁸⁾ (Py 1980 & Galisson 1980: 32-33), to take an interest in the languages of departure, Arabic or French, the pre-acquired multilingual skills of the learners and their learning strategies to ensure FL2 acquisition. As pointed out by Galisson who says that "*interlanguage, on the other hand, varies depending on individuals, and on its evolution which is neither constant nor uniform.*" (1980: 23-33). In fact, according to Castellotti: "*the concept of interlanguage, now a central concept in language didactics, was born of the works on error analysis in foreign language learning, based on a reasonable criticism of the contrastive analysis.*" (Castellotti, 2001: 18).

In addition, language teaching specialists have contributed to legitimize uses which, until then, were undervalued, as the

8 - The concept of interlanguage covers all the steps that allow a learner to move from an initial state of foreign language- close to the mother tongue- a final state of the same language-. The interlanguage is not only a permanent reconstruction, but a succession of states conditioned by the learning strategies implemented, therefore variable from one subject to another. In other words, the learner interlanguage features, since it is dependent on its learning strategy. (Galisson, R. 1980 :32-33)

alternation of languages (Castellotti & Moore 1999), and to take into account all learners' multilingual and multicultural skills in class practices, as well in the implementation of the curricula and training courses (Coste, Moore & Zarate 1997, Council of Europe 2001). Thus, learners are encouraged to explore socially and cognitively the languages involved, in our case the MT (Arabic) and the FL1 (French), in school systems that break along with the dogma of the direct method, in this case the exclusion of the MT and the FL1, and to promote the use of the linguistic prerequisites, henceforth seen as pivotal to learning.

In our view, the achievements of both the MT (Arabic) and/or the FL1 (French) should be perceived as advantageous assets on which the acquisition of the FL2 can be founded. The early learning of the FL1, owing to its similarities with the FL2, can only have beneficial effects for the acquisition of FL2.

To sum up, the learners' linguistic diversity and public education contexts lead teachers, researchers and trainers to re-examine contextualized teachings. The classroom has gradually become the place of observation of the sociolinguistic context effects in educational interactions, especially with regard to the FL teaching/learning.

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