Language teaching in a globalised world: Harnessing linguistic super-diversity in the classroom.

Abstract:

The student body is becoming increasingly diverse in terms of language, nationality and cultural background. This study explores ways in which such linguistic diversity can be harnessed in the language classroom to enhance the language learning process. This paper describes a series of activities which were designed and implemented in four higher education language classrooms in Ireland. The activities included awareness-raising of the language profile of students taking a particular language module, and facilitated comparison of key grammatical concepts in both the target languages of the groups concerned (German and Japanese) and in the other languages in the participants' linguistic repertoires. The grammatical concepts included cases, sentence structure, tenses, passive voice and register. Analysis of participant feedback indicates that 36% of the participants were unaware of the other languages spoken by their fellow students prior to participating in the study, with 80% describing such knowledge as valuable to them. More than two thirds (70%) of participants described the activities as aiding their study of their target language.

Keywords: super-diversity; foreign language learning; foreign language teaching; higher education, linguistic repertoire, plurilingualism

Introduction: Globalisation and super-diversity:

The forces of globalization, including increased mobility of people, capital, technologies and information networks have resulted in a dramatic increase in diversity around the world. There are approximately 175 nationalities within the borders of the European Union and in 2012 alone, there were an estimated 1.7 million immigrants to EU countries from outside the EU (Eurostat, 2014). In 2013, the foreign population of the EU-27 was 20.4 million while the foreign-born population was 33.5 million (Eurostat, 2014), bringing about major changes in the European linguistic landscape.

This dramatic increase in diversity has transformed 'diversity' into 'super-diversity' (Pauwels, 2014; Vertovec, 2006), a phenomenon characterised by an exponential increase in the categories of migrants 'not only in terms of nationality, ethnicity, language, and religion, but also in terms of motives, patterns and itineraries of migration…' (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011, p.1). It is reflected within the student body in terms of linguistic knowledge, cultural background and life-experiences (Liddicoat et al, 2014; Sudhershan and Bruen, 2015).

Such super-diversity is transforming the way we think, learn and know, with some scholars expressing the fear that educational institutions are not yet in a position to deal with such change (Gkaintartzi et al, 2015; Moore, 2014; Pauwel, 2014). According to Kramsch (2014, p. 2), language and language education in particular are at the forefront of such concerns. Moore (2014, p. 586) comments that an 'internationalised' university classroom is 'a context that is currently underrepresented in research, although increasingly common in practice'. This is particularly true for the 'internationalised' higher education language classroom featuring a high degree of linguistic diversity among its students. Mazak and Herbas-Donoso (2014) also comment on the lack of research that has taken place in a higher education context.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the process of filling this gap in the literature by moving beyond attempts to assess teachers' attitudes towards linguistic super-diversity in the classroom towards the design and evaluation of pedagogic activities designed to harness such diversity and enhance the language learning experience. The following section examines the theoretical framework within which approaches to the harnessing of super-diversity in the language classroom can be explored. A case-study which was carried out in the language classrooms of an Irish university is then presented and the implications of its findings considered.

Super-diversity and the language classroom:

The traditional language classroom tends to view language as a discrete unit, where speakers of more than one language are perceived as 'flicking on and off a language switch' (Mazak and Herbas-Donoso, 2014, p. 3). Scarino (2014, p. 270) is of the view that 'a monolingual mindset' exists in such classrooms which results in a failure to recognize the linguistic and cultural diversity of students as part of the process of learning. Gogolin supports such a view and describes an approach of this kind as arising from a 'monolingual habitus' or 'deficit perspective' (2011: 242) on diversity.

Many of the linguistic phenomena associated with super-diversity are, however, changing the way in which languages are perceived. There is a growing sense among researchers in this field (for example Canagarajah, 2011; Jørgensen et al, 2011; Mazak and Herbas-Donoso, 2014) that languages do not operate as bounded systems of specific sets of linguistic features. Instead,

they would appear to be integrated and interconnected in the mind of the language learner. As a result, in the words of Blommaert and Rampton (2011, p. 3), '..rather than working with homogeneity, stability and boundedness as the starting assumptions, mobility, mixing, political dynamics and historical embedding are now central concerns in the study of languages, language groups and communication'.

However, although this is an under-researched area, the small number of studies that have been conducted indicate that many teachers remain unaware of the different languages spoken by the students in their classrooms. For example, a study carried out by Gkaintartzi et al (2015) reported that while teachers describe linguistic diversity as positive in theory, they tend to ignore its existence in the classroom.

Similarly, Pauwel's (2014) study of university language lecturers in Australia and Great Britain indicates a low level of awareness and a limited degree of engagement with super-diversity in the classroom. For example, only 15 of the 62 language lecturers interviewed for Pauwel's study responded that they had 'some knowledge' (2014, p. 314) of their students' language profiles with the 'knowledge' referred to primarily relating to the presence of native speakers of the target language. A significant number of those interviewed not only expressed a low level of knowledge of the language profile of their students but also considered this knowledge to be not 'terribly relevant' (2014, p. 314) to the teaching process. Responses from the subjects of Pauwel's study concerning ways in which they would adapt their teaching to the differing language profiles of their students were limited. However, they did include 'making more explicit reference to other languages in terms of patterns and structures, allowing more mixed language practices in the classroom (e.g. code-switching), placing a greater focus on enhancing metalinguistic awareness among the students and incorporating less "traditional" communicative practices (e.g. text messaging, blogs, youth registers)' (2014, p. 314).

Other studies that have explored the theoretical concept of linguistic repertoires include Jeoffrion et al (2014), Moore (2014), Canagarajah (2011) and Ritzau (2014). Jeoffrion et al (2014) surveyed 684 students at the University of Nantes in France. Their findings indicated that more advanced students who have larger linguistic repertoires tend to have a greater appreciation of the plurlingual nature of language learning than do beginners with more limited repertoires. Looking at a university L2 immersion context, Moore (2014: 586) demonstrates how the

mobilisation of linguistic repertoires "may be advantageous for learning a language and participation in similar higher education classroom settings'. In particular, her analysis revealed how students mobilized their L1 in facilitating their access to learning objects in their L2 (Moore, 2014: 605). Canagarajah (2011) looks at the language learning strategies of a Saudi Arabian undergraduate, showing that the student used all of her communicative repertoire as an integrated system. Similarly, in her study of university students taking a beginners Danish language module, Ritzau (2014) explores how language students' identities relate to their written language use and argues that participants draw on several languages when producing learning journals.

Harnessing super-diversity in the language classroom: A case-study

Research Questions:

The immigration statistics for Ireland for the last two decades reveal that super-diversity is now a reality in contemporary Ireland. Coupled with a growing influx of international students, many Irish higher education classrooms can also be described as characterised by the presence of linguistic super-diversity.

This study was intended to identify the degree of linguistic diversity which existed within the language classes participating in this study and to elicit students' views regarding the value of being aware of such diversity. It was also designed to elicit participants' views regarding the value of explicitly comparing the workings of key grammar concepts in the target language of the module in question, and in the additional languages and different mother tongues spoken by the class group. Specifically, the study aimed to address the following research questions: 1) To what extent does linguistic diversity exist within the language classes that formed part of this study? 2) To what extent do the participants in this study value an awareness of the linguistic diversity present in their language classes? and 3) To what extent do the participants in this study value the pedagogic activities designed to encourage them to compare key grammar concepts in the target language and in the other languages spoken by their class?

Participants:

Seventy-three students, enrolled in four different language modules, participated in this study. The modules comprised one first year German language module, one first year Japanese language module, one second year German language module and one second year Japanese module[1]. The students, ranging in age from 18 to 22, were in either their second or fourth semester of a four year undergraduate degree in Applied Language and Translation Studies (ALTS), International Business (INTB) or Joint Honours (Arts) (JH). Two participants were exchange students and were thus registered for individual modules, rather than taking any particular degree strand. Table 1 illustrates a breakdown of students by module, degree and gender. As shown in Table 1, while the number of students taking second semester German and second semester Japanese modules was the same (n=19), the number of fourth semester Japanese students (n=23) was almost double the number of students taking fourth semester German (n = 12). Female participants greatly outnumbered male participants in all categories, with the exception of an equal gender balance in second semester Japanese (Table 1).

Table 1: Breakdown of participants by module, degree and gender.

Taken as a whole, 17 mother tongues were represented among the participants (Figure 1), with fourteen additional languages spoken by the participants. These are Spanish, Korean, Russian, Japanese, Italian, Portuguese, Latin, French, English, Irish, German, Arabic, Mandarin and Thai (For a breakdown of languages spoken by year and group, see Appendix 2).

Figure 1: Participant Mother Tongues

[1] The study was conducted in line with institutional guidelines on research ethics and written permission for the research was received from the Institutional Research Ethics Office. According to institutional requirements, all students who participated in the study received a Plain Language Statement explaining the purpose of the study and signed an Informed Consent Form.

German and Japanese languages were selected for the case study due to their dissimilar linguistic structures and divergent orthography. Selecting two divergent languages facilitated exploration of whether language learners draw on their own linguistic repertoire to a greater or lesser extent when learning a language which is more or less convergent with the other languages in that repertoire. First and second year students were selected as participants in light of the fact that studies (for example Ritzau 2014) indicate an evolving view of language learning over time.

Design, instruments, procedure and data analysis:

Data was gathered using two questionnaires developed for this study, a Language Profile Questionnaire and an Evaluation (Appendix 1). The Language Profile Questionnaire was administered during the first week of each of the four twelve-week language modules. This questionnaire generated a language profile of the students by asking them to state their mother tongue and any additional languages they speak. Students assessed their competence levels in their additional languages using the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR), the CEFR scales having been explained to all participants in advance. The data from the Language Profile Questionnaires was used to generate a Language Profile for each class (Appendix 2). These were made available to the students in the second week of the semester.

As a next step, a series of three classroom activities, intended to promote plurilingual learning, and graphically presented in Figure 2, were conducted in each of the four modules included in this study.

Figure 2: Activities

As indicated in the first column of Figure 2, each activity lasted either fifty or one hundred minutes of scheduled class time, depending on the class size and followed a standard basic format summarised in the fourth column of Figure 2. Each one began with a short (10 minute) presentation by the lecturer on a particular grammar topic from the target language of that class, that is, German or Japanese, depending on the module. Participants were then divided into small groups of approximately three or four students to prepare presentations of between ten and fifteen minutes on how selected grammatical features operate in the languages spoken by their group when compared with the target language of the module (either German or Japanese). As far as was feasible, the groups were selected in order to maximise the number of languages

the group members had in common. Once all of the presentations had been completed, a class discussion took place on the similarities and differences observed between the workings of the grammar topic in the target language and the additional common languages shared by the small group. This discussion was facilitated by the lecturer. For example, in one session devoted to the formation of the past tense, one of the small groups whose members all spoke Spanish and English, in addition to the language they were studying, German, compared how past tenses were formed in Spanish, English and German. They presented the commonalities and differences they observed to the rest of their class.

The full set of grammar topics addressed during this study was selected on the basis of the significance of the individual concepts in the target language, the course outline, grammar syllabus and module learning outcomes for the four modules involved in the study and a summary is presented in columns two, three and four of Figure 2. As indicated in this figure, the first and second year German class groups reviewed the marking and function of cases, sentence structure, in particular the position of subjects and objects, the impact of conjunctions on word order and the formation of relative clauses, and the formation of past tenses. The first year students focused on the formation of the perfect past tense as they had not yet covered the imperfect tense in German. The second year students of German considered the formation of both the perfect and the imperfect tenses in German and the other languages spoken by members of the class. First year Japanese language students reviewed the Japanese subject, object, verb (SOV) word order and compared this to the word order of other languages in their linguistic repertoire. The function of postpositions was the focus of the second year activities, and in particular, students compared the function of Japanese postpositions with that of English prepositions and discussed the similarities between Japanese postpositions with case markers in other languages, most notably German. First year students also looked at the formation of relative clauses in Japanese. Politeness registers, both in terms of verbal and non-verbal communication, were also considered. Social ranking in different cultures was discussed and students identified various people that should be addressed with a particular politeness register, such as the elderly and teachers. The final grammatical concept reviewed by second years was the causative and passive voice in Japanese.

Minor variations and enhancements to the basic format outlined in Figure 2 were introduced for some of the activities. For example, when looking at cases, students in the German language modules were given a sentence in English [The man gives a book to his mother] to translate into German and at least two other languages spoken by the group. The students were then asked to spend approximately fifteen minutes identifying similarities and differences in the way cases were indicated in the different languages with this work forming a starting point for their presentations. Similarly, when first year students of Japanese were looking at relative clauses, they were asked to produce a sentence in English that contained a relative clause. They subsequently reviewed how this sentence, and in particular the relative clause, was expressed in Japanese and eight other languages that formed part of the group's linguistic repertoire. In the final week of the semester, the Evaluation was used to elicit participants' views regarding the value of being aware of the language profile of their class and the value of the activities described above.

The information generated using the Evaluation was analysed using both quantitative analysis of the answers provided to the yes/no elements of questions 1, 2 and 3; and thematic content analysis of the material generated using the open-ended elements of questions 2 to 8, as follows: The quantitative analysis involved the calculation of the total number of 'yes' responses to each question, the total number of 'no' responses and any non-responses, both in absolute terms and expressed as percentages for all of the participants. This process was repeated for the sub-groups contained within the sample, i.e. all first year participants (total), all first year participants (German), all first year participants (Japanese), all second year participants (total), all second year participants (German) and all second year participants (Japanese). The qualitative analysis involved repeated and in-depth reading of the open-ended responses contained in the evaluations by the researchers. All of the themes or points made in each response were identified and noted. Where the same point was addressed by more than one participant, this was recorded. This analysis was completed firstly for all of the participants, and then for each of the sub-groups contained within the sample and listed in the previous paragraph.

Findings:

Awareness of the language profile of the group and attitudes towards the value of such awareness:

Sixty-four percent of the participants were aware of the language profile of their class prior to receiving it. Participants in their second year displayed a higher level of awareness of the languages spoken by their class than first years for both target language groups. In addition, the majority (82%) of the participants felt that such awareness was valuable. This was consistent across first and second year students. Japanese language students were slightly more positive about the value of an awareness of the language profile of the class group than were students of German.

Table 2: Prior awareness of class language profile and attitude towards value of awareness

Qualitative content analysis of the reasons given by the participants for valuing an awareness of the language profile of their class suggested that they did so for a range of pragmatic, social and affective reasons. The most frequent reason concerned the benefit to the individual student of being in a linguistically diverse classroom. Students used phrases such as 'they can help you', referring to the notion that it would be a good opportunity to practice speaking to their peer in their peer's mother tongue. Two students commented indeed that this opportunity could be mutually beneficial:

> You can help one another with language learning in general maybe as part of tandem pairs.
> Yes, as we can compare the different languages in order to help one another understand different grammatical aspects

A small number also felt that it was important in terms of the social cohesion of the group stating:

> It is useful to know the levels of English of other people to make sure you are not speaking too fast
> It's important to know about the other people in our class, where they come from etc. in terms of understanding each other better and appreciating the differences that exist
> You get to know your peers a little better.

Students also noted that they could now tell whether other students had a competitive advantage in learning the target language through having another language in their repertoire which was similar to the target language. They commented:

> Students who speak German seem to have a greater ease with [Japanese] grammar and French has no correlation. So I feel it's useful so that we are aware of which students have the slight advantage and which don't.
> Sometimes certain languages help people to learn other foreign languages easier. For example, if someone knows Chinese it might be easier to learn Japanese than people who know European languages, therefore this person may have a better grasp of the writing system or grammar point …..things that are made easier for some people because some areas in the languages they know are conceptually similar to those in Japanese.
> Good to know what capabilities others have.

In affective terms, it motivated some learners to see what their classmates are capable of.

> When I talk to other people about the languages they speak, it gives me hope for Japanese. Several people in the class are speaking English as a second language. It makes me realise the potential level that I could reach in Japanese.

Others were reassured by the fact that they were not the only non-native English speaker in the group:

> At first I thought all other students are Irish, but I knew there were French after a few weeks. I was encouraged to study German harder by knowing that other non-English speakers study German here / in English.

> Other students find it reassuring when they realise that they are not alone in 'struggling with learning two languages'.

Students who felt that an awareness of the language profile of their group did not facilitate the language learning process, reported that they considered it a distraction, or source of confusion, eating into time that would otherwise be spent learning the target language.

Attitudes towards the activities:

The majority of students (70%) described the activities as beneficial (Table 3) with more first year (84%) than second year students (56%) of this view. There were no obvious differences

between the German language modules on the one hand and the Japanese language modules on the other, with 71% of German students and 69% of Japanese students positively disposed to the activities (Table 3).

Table 3: Attitudes towards the activities

The most frequently reported reason which emerged from the data in support of a positive attitude was the fact that the activities facilitated the identification of similarities and differences between groups of languages, or more commonly language pairs, contained in the participants' linguistic repertoires, and some students noted that they would not have observed as many details on their own. Frequent reference was made to a number of areas: past tense formation in French, German and Spanish; cases in French, German, Spanish, Japanese, Hungarian and Irish; word order in English, German, French and Spanish; and more specifically Japanese postpositions and German case markers.

Specifically, learners described how they used their knowledge of how past tenses are formed in French, for example, to aid their understanding of the process in German, commenting 'I used to look at French and English to help me understand how grammar works in German. For example, the perfect tense in German is slightly similar to the passé compose in French' or 'I compare the formation of the past tense in German with the past tense in French as the rules are similar' or in the same vein, '…the *to have* and *to be* are the auxiliary verbs used in the past tense of French and German…'. Differences in the formation of the past tense were also commented on as being of value to the language learning process, albeit less frequently, with one student commenting that '[the activities]…helped clarify the structure of the German perfect tense and how it is not used as much in my other language, Spanish'.

The exercise appeared to clarify the function of cases among the learners with many realising for the first time "that the cases are in every language" including English. Several also observed similarities between German and Japanese as follows:

> It made clear to me the connection between the German case system (accusative, dative and genitive) and how these relate to the Japanese particles. I think it helped me with understanding the Japanese particles more than before this was pointed out.

> I found relating Japanese particles to the German cases very useful. During the summer my German suffered as I wasn't using it but when certain particles were explained to me in Japanese class, I felt that I had a better understanding of the cases in German.

Responses regarding sentence structure and word order focused on the difference between German and other languages such as French and Spanish. One participant commented, 'For example when learning about word order in German, I learnt that I had to study it from scratch as it was vastly different from my other languages', with others stating that the work on word order was useful '…because this is something I find difficult to learn in German because French is similar to the English word order.' Others commented that the activity '…helped my [German] word order and understanding the logic behind conjunctions' and 'the position of verbs in sentences' as well as noting that it is interesting to see how the different word order works in other languages and then relate it to yours.'

With regard to Japanese postpositions and German case markers, a student of both German and Japanese language noted that they '…found that comparing the German and Japanese helped me a little with Japanese postpositions. It made me realise that I can identify which postposition I have to use by asking the sentence case questions like 'what?', 'who?', 'whom?', 'whose?'. Similarly, another observed:

> I found it very useful as I do Japanese and German and it benefitted me to see how postpositions and cases have their similarities.

The qualitative analysis also suggests that the class activities helped reinforce and revise particular grammar points. Illustrative comments included 'it helped things click in my mind', 'showing a grammar point from two different languages reinforces the point', 'it cemented things in my head', 'it helped me grasp certain grammar points a lot quicker' and 'it helped me remember the grammar points better'.

In addition, analysis of the students' reported reasons for describing the activities as useful suggests that they found them to be supportive of the language learning process more generally. They commented that 'it's easier to find my mistakes', '[the activities] helped me understand why I find French so difficult', '[the activities] helped me to find other ways of learning' and '[the activities] help[s] you discover and understand things you wouldn't have

done before'. The notion of a 'different perspective' on language learning was voiced by a number of students, and students also spoke of the value of researching the different tasks and having to formulate their own rules regarding the formation of the past-tense in the different languages in their repertoires. A sense of working between languages other than the mother tongue also emerged with one participant commenting that 'it was good because I was thinking in French and German rather than in English.'

Students positively disposed towards the activities also appeared to find them engaging with the word 'interesting' occurring 16 times in their responses. A number of students said that the activity was useful because it provided them with an indicator as to what language(s) they might consider studying in the future.

On the other hand, several reasons were given by students who did not consider the activities to be beneficial. For example, several suggested that comparing languages causes confusion and commented that they found it easier to concentrate on one language at a time with the word 'confusing' or 'confused' occurring four times and the word 'lost' occurring once in their responses. In addition, while a number of students noted that class activities looking at how specific grammar concepts were expressed in different languages were interesting, they felt that they were not necessarily useful, particularly if students did not know the language to which a comparison was being made. They commented, for example, that:

> …where I didn't speak the other languages, it wasn't much help for me to see how the cases, past tense etc. works in those languages.'
>
> While I did find it extremely interesting, nearly all correlations found between Japanese and the other languages were in a language I don't know or understand, making it difficult to use them in order to better learn / understand Japanese.

Four students also expressed the view that the activities used up valuable class time that could otherwise have been spent on learning the target language and on exam preparation.

When asked if, as a result of these class activities, they were likely to change how they might approach learning new grammar concepts in the future, 54% of participants replied in the affirmative. Analysis by year and by target language group revealed no obvious difference between first and second years in this regard (Table 4). A difference emerged however when the

target language groups were compared, with more students of German language likely to change their approach to learning the target language in both first and second year when compared with students of Japanese language in both first and second year (Table 4).

Table 4: Impact on future learning strategies

The qualitative data provides deeper insights into what participants meant when indicating that the activities would impact or already has impacted their future learning strategies.

> Definitely when we start a new grammar lesson in German now I always refer back to French to make it easier.
> Absolutely. Ever since this exercise, I've been comparing all my languages to Japanese, and trying to learn the rules for the grammar in Japanese. It may be difficult and involve a lot of reading and study, but I certainly feel that it has, and will change how I study grammar concepts. It has helped my study techniques in that, if I can, I will pair up a new Japanese grammar rule with one I already know in Spanish.

Of the 38% of first years and 47% of second years who said that these activities would not alter their learning strategies, reasons given included:

> I think I prefer keeping German separate as it's quite different from my other languages.
> When learning a language I find it useful not to think about how it is expressed in another language but rather to think in that language.
> I think I would get more confused
> I prefer to learn the rules as they are and not question why because then I get confused.
> I was already thinking this way before we did this exercise, so I'm not sure it changed it exactly, but it's made it more concrete as a learning method.

The majority of participants were in favour of having such activities included as part of future language classes (Table 5). There are differences, nonetheless, at the level of individual language groups. In first year, the students in the German language class were considerably more positively disposed towards the activity than are the students in the Japanese language group. This position was reversed in year two.

Table 5: Attitude towards the inclusion of such activities in future language classes

Many students commented on the timing and frequency of such activities and the form that they should take with no marked differences by year or target language. For example, several students noted that it would be a valuable exercise if done at the beginning of a first year language module, with phrases such as 'from time to time, briefly and quickly', 'every now and then', 'casually' and 'not too frequently'. Others commented that they would like it done as a separate module or a workshop-style class, as they felt it was of value, but they did not want it to take up class time that could be spent on the target language. Some students favoured the use of a written format, suggesting either an online forum, potentially housed within an institutional virtual learning environment, or a platform such as 'Google Drive', where participants can comment on the languages that form part of their repertoire, allowing for more in-depth discussions outside of class time, enabling students to only get involved in discussions if they shared a particular language, a particular language pair or a particular group of languages.

Discussion:

A limited amount of research has been conducted to date on ways in which the increasing linguistic diversity present in the student body can be harnessed in the higher education language classroom. Where research has been conducted, the focus has been on the attitudes of teachers towards the presence of linguistic diversity in the classroom. The purpose of this study was to move beyond attitudinal research in order to explore ways in which linguistic super-diversity can be harnessed in the language classroom and incorporated into pedagogical practice.

Specifically, this paper reports on a study which involved determining and disseminating the language profile of four class groups of university language students. A series of activities were then designed and implemented. These took the form of activities designed to encourage the participants to access their linguistic repertoire to aid in the acquisition of their target language, either German or Japanese. The participants' views regarding the value of both of the above were gathered and analysed.

The findings indicate that fewer than one in four participants were aware of the other languages spoken by their class group before receiving the language profile of their class from the researchers. In particular, fewer than half of first years were aware of the language profile of

the class despite being in their second semester with the particular group. These findings resonate with those of Gkaintartzi et al (2015) and Pauwels (2014) who report a lack of awareness on the part of teachers of their students' linguistic repertoires. The findings of this study indicate that there is scope for raising the awareness of both teachers and students, particularly students in their first year, by way of an exercise such as the use of a Language Profile Questionnaire to generate a Class Language profile.

A significant majority of the participants describe an awareness of the linguistic repertoire of their fellow students as being of value to them in their language learning. They cite a number of reasons in support of this view. These range from the pragmatic 'they can help you', to the social 'you get to know your peers', 'it is good to know what capabilities others have..' to motivational factors 'it makes me realise the potential level that I could reach'. A greater proportion of second year students (86% compared with 72% of first years) value an awareness of the language profile of the class. This may indicate the greater appreciation of the plurilingual nature of language learning among more advanced students which was also observed by Jeoffrion et al (2014). This also echoes that of Ritzau (2014) whose study indicates an evolving view of language learning over time.

Seventeen per cent of the total number of participants remain, nonetheless, unconvinced of the value of an awareness of the language profile of the class, perceiving it, for example, as a 'distraction' possibly echoing teachers' views that the linguistic repertoires of their students are not 'terribly relevant' (Section 2). This finding may indicate the existence of a 'monolingual mindset' (Section 2) on the part of some of these students, where languages are viewed as discrete, bounded units to be acquired independently of one another. Such views may result in some resistance to attempts to integrate exercises designed to harness linguistic diversity into language classrooms. This may also be a factor in explaining negative responses to the activities which formed the heart of this case study on the part of a minority of the participants.

The activities themselves were positively received on the whole with 70% of the participants describing them as useful. Eighty-four per cent of those participants in their first year at university described them as useful compared with 56% of second years, however. This negates somewhat Jeoffrion et al's (2014) finding that a greater appreciation of the plurilingual nature of language learning is to be found in more advanced language learners. It would also

seem to negate any suggestion that plurilingual learning is less likely among more divergent languages. More extensive, ideally longitudinal studies, involving students with very different languages within their linguistic repertoires, would help to shed further light on these questions.

Those students who found the activity-based activities helpful did so primarily because they facilitated the identification of specific grammar issues which function in the same manner in language pairs, or groups of languages, contained within their personal linguistic repertoire. Examples include the formation of the perfect tense in German and French, the marking of cases in German, Japanese and Hungarian, rules governing word order in English, French and Spanish; and the use of Japanese postpositions and German case markers. This finding is underlined by the fact that those students who described the activities as not being of value explained this view with reference to the fact that they did not have knowledge of languages which worked in a similar manner to one another, 'I didn't find any of it particularly useful since there were very little similarities between my second language and Japanese.'

A smaller number of participants did, however, identify analysis of how specific grammar issues differ between particular languages as supportive of their language learning. Such issues include the formation and use of the perfect past tense in German and Spanish, word order in German compared with French, English or Spanish, and the marking of cases in German when compared with French, English and/or Spanish.

Student feedback regarding the activities also suggests that they helped to reinforce and revise material as well as encouraging them to 'take a different perspective on language learning'. '…it [participation in the activities] just changed the way I look at language.' They also described the activities as engaging and interesting.

However, what added value for some was negatively perceived by others. Of the 24% of participants who indicated that the activities were not useful to them, a source of 'confusion' and 'distraction' were the primary reasons given. It is likely that these views relate to the preferred learning style of these students and reflect their belief system regarding the nature of language learning as discussed previously in the context of the value associated by some participants with an awareness of the language profile of the class.

An additional useful assessor of attitude is the extent to which it has resulted or is likely to result in behavioural change. Of the participants in this study, 54% expressed the view that their approach to language learning is likely to be influenced or had already been influenced as a result of engagement with the plurilingual activities, with students in the German language class more likely to alter their behavior in both first and second year. Those participants who described themselves as unlikely to alter their language learning behavior gave as their reasons a fear of confusion and a desire to keep their languages separate from one another and in one case to "think in the target language".

Conclusion:

This small-scale case-study was designed to explore ways in which linguistic super-diversity can be harnessed in the higher education language classroom. The findings support the view that it is possible to use the linguistic diversity increasingly present in the higher education classroom to enhance the language learning process. They demonstrate that one way in which this can be done is by creating environments either inside the classroom, outside of class, or via online fora, in which selected groups of students can compare (and contrast) key grammar areas in two or more of the languages they have in common. Findings from this study also suggest that potentially useful elements of a 'multilingual pedagogy' (de Angelis, 2011, p. 226) are likely to include awareness raising exercises concerning the language profile of a language group using tools similar to the Language Profile Questionnaire developed for this study.

Further research into the impact of raising the awareness of students of the linguistic diversity present in their classrooms and the benefit of harnessing this linguistic diversity is called for, as well as further development of instruments which could be used for this purpose. Feedback from participants was obtained in this study by way of written reflection. Alternative instruments such as focus groups or individual in-depth interviews might potentially provide further insights into how the activities are experienced by students. Given that this study was conducted in one particular higher education context and setting, it is not possible to generalize the findings to other situations. To address this, similar studies in other settings potentially involving more than three activities per class group, possibly over a longer time period than one semester, would potentially provide further useful insights. Our experience with this study suggests that such sessions should be facilitated by lecturers proficient in both, or all of, the

languages spoken by the small groups, an aspect which may pose some logistical challenges. In addition, from this study, it would appear that grammatical concepts which work in a similar fashion in the languages the learner has in common are more useful in supporting the language learning process than those which function completely differently across languages. However, further research into this is needed, given that feedback from participants was contradictory in this regard, with some participants commenting that observing differences between languages is more beneficial to their language learning than observing similarities. If linguistic super-diversity is to be more effectively harnessed in the language classroom, further research on how an environment conducive to such an approach and the types of supports required, be they infrastructural, training-related or both, is called for.

Finally, a small proportion of participants expressed the view that they would prefer not to engage with the linguistic diversity present in their classrooms as they did not see it as supporting their language learning. While it is important that the students' preferred learning approaches and strategies be respected, this research supports Horwitz's (1988) suggestion that discussion on the nature of language learning be used to inform students' beliefs regarding the nature of language learning. Research findings in the field of language acquisition can be presented to language learners at an appropriate level, possibly in the target language. For this to take place convincingly, further research on the potential benefits of plurilingual activities such as those described in this paper are required. Specifically, those using a treatment and control framework which assess the impact of plurilingual activities on language proficiency over time are recommended.

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Appendix 1.

LANGUAGE PROFILE QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME: _____ MODULE: _____

1. What is your mother tongue? _____

2. Which other languages do you speak / have some knowledge of? Please complete the table below where A1 represents beginner's level and C2 native speaker proficiency.

Language	A1 Beginner 1	A2 Beginner 2	B1 Intermediate 1	B2 Intermediate 2	C1 Advanced 1	C2 Advanced 2

EVALUATION

1. Were you aware of the other languages spoken by members of your class before you saw your class profile? Please circle yes/no.

2. Do you think it useful to know which other languages your classmates speak?
   Please circle yes/no
   Please explain your answer below:

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. This semester we looked at how word order, cases and past tenses work in some of the different languages spoken by your class.

   Did you find these activities useful? Please circle yes/no.
   Please explain your answer below:

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. What did you find the most useful part of this exercise, if any?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

5. Prior to looking at how these grammar concepts are expressed in other languages, did you ever think about this, or did you ever look at one of the languages you already know in order to help you understand how the grammar works in German?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

6. Has this exercise changed how you might go about learning new grammar concepts in German in the future?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

7. Would you like this type of exercise to be included in more of your language classes on a permanent basis?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

8. Can you think of any other ways in which the many languages spoken by the students in your class could help the class in learning German?

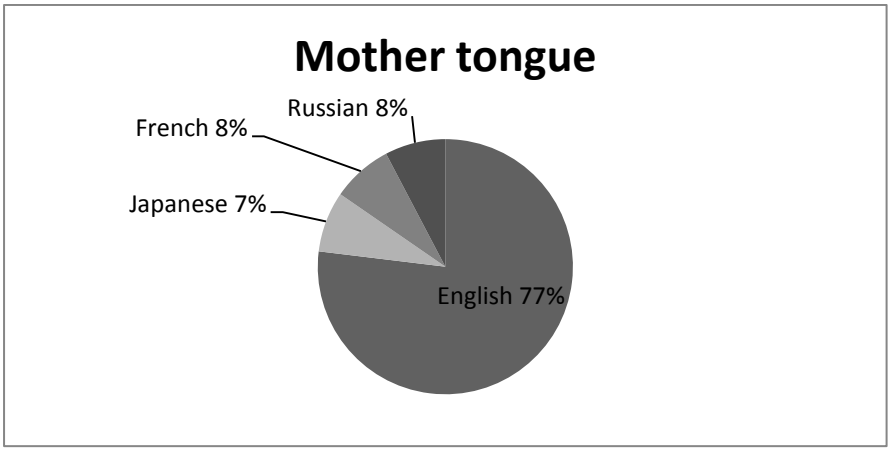
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you! Vielen Dank! ありがとうございます。

APPENDIX 2: Language profiles

1) Language Profile of GE267 Class of 14[2] students

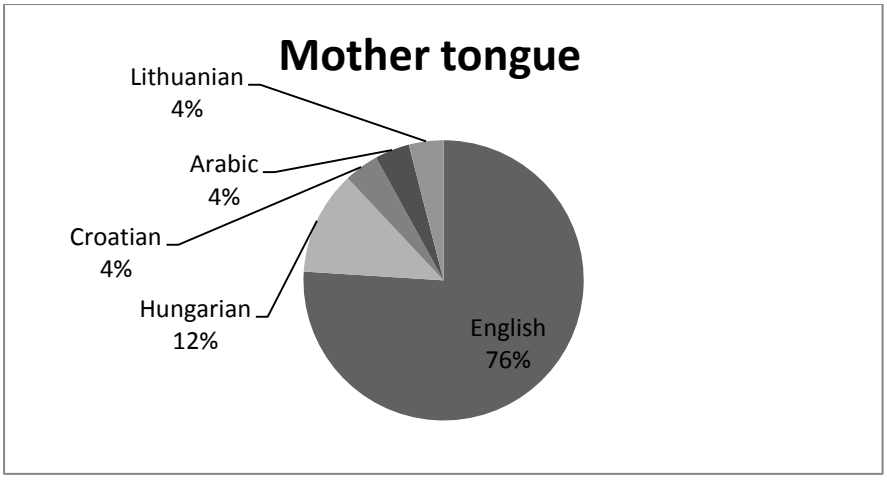
Additional Language(s) other than mother tongue	A1 Beginner 1	A2 Beginner 2	B1 Intermediate 1	B2 Intermediate 2	C1 Advanced 1	C2 Advanced 2
German		10	3	1		
Irish	1	3	4	1		
English				1	2	1
French	1		1	4	1	
Latin			1			
Portuguese	1					1
Italian	1					
Japanese		1				
Russian	1					
Korean	1					
Spanish			1	1		1



[2] While 14 students were officially enrolled on this module initially and present in week 1, 12 completed the module and were present on the day the Evaluation was completed. Therefore, the 12 students who completed all elements are recorded as participants for the purpose of the study.

2) Language Profile of GE110 – 25[3] students

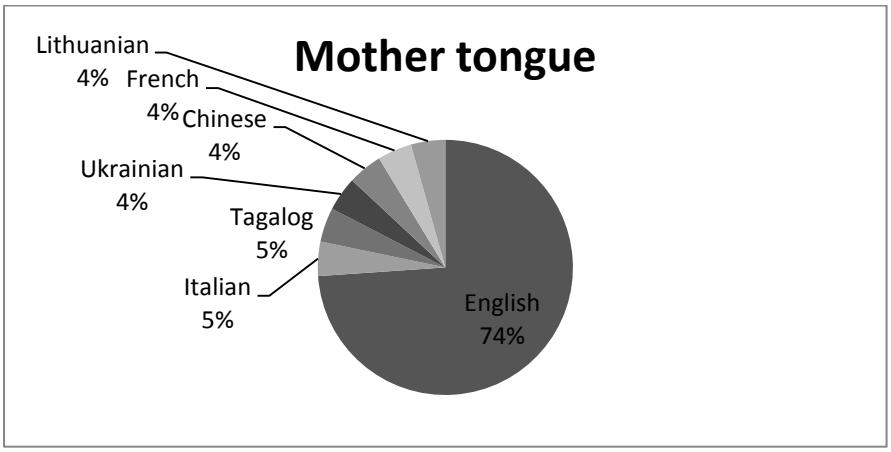
Additional Language(s) other than mother tongue	A1 Beginner 1	A2 Beginner 2	B1 Intermediate 1	B2 Intermediate 2	C1 Advanced 1	C2 Advanced 2
German	20	5				
Irish	1	2	5	7		
English					4	2
French		1	4	4		
Italian				1		
Arabic	1					
Spanish			8			



[3] While 25 students were officially enrolled on this student and present in week 1, 19 were present on the day the Evaluation was completed. Therefore, the 19 students who completed all elements are recorded as participants for the purpose of the study.

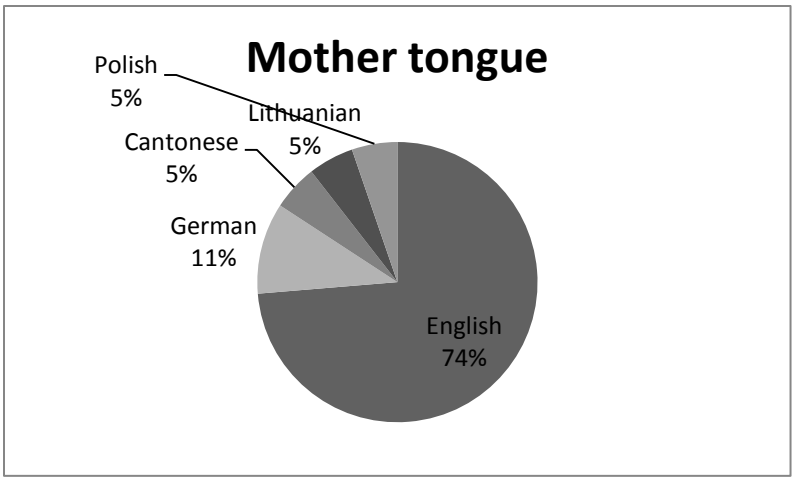
3) Language Profile of JA267 Class of 23 students

Additional Language(s) other than mother tongue	A1 Beginner 1	A2 Beginner 2	B1 Intermediate 1	B2 Intermediate 2	C1 Advanced 1	C2 Advanced 2
German			1	1	1	
Irish	2		5	2		1
English					3	3
French	1	2	4	8		
Chinese	1					
Thai	1					
Japanese		9	14			
Russian		1				1
Spanish	1	2	3			



4) Language Profile of JA110 – 19 students

Additional Language(s) other than mother tongue	A1 Beginner 1	A2 Beginner 2	B1 Intermediate 1	B2 Intermediate 2	C1 Advanced 1	C2 Advanced 2
German	1	1	3	1		
Irish	2	2	8	2		
English						4
French	1	3	2	3		1
Italian						
Japanese		18	2			
Spanish	1		4		1	
Latin					1	
Mandarin				1		
Korean				1		
Silesian				1		



Tables and Figures.

Table 1: Breakdown of participants by module, degree and gender.

Participants	ALTS	INTB	JH	Exchange	Total	Male	Female
Japanese language/ semester 2	13	3	3	0	19	10	9
Japanese language/ semester 4	14	1	7	1	23	5	18
German language/semester 2	13	4	2	0	19	5	14
German language/semester 4	5	2	4	1	12	2	10

Table 2: Prior awareness of class language profile and attitude towards value of awareness

Had prior awareness of the language profile of the class group	**Yes**	**No**	**No response**
No. of participants	**47**	**21**	**6**
% of participants	**64**	**28**	**8**
% of first year students	**43**	**46**	**11**
% of second year students	**83**	**11**	**6**
% of German students	**61**	**32**	**4**
% of Japanese students	**64**	**26**	**10**
Value associated with awareness of the language profile of the class			
No. of participants	**60**	**12**	**1**
% of participants	**82**	**17**	**1**
% of first year students	**78**	**19**	**3**
% of second year students	**86**	**14**	**0**
% of German students	**74**	**26**	**0**
% of Japanese students	**88**	**10**	**2**

Table 3: Attitudes towards the activities

Group/Attitude	Positive	Negative	No response
No. of participants	51	18	4
% of participants	70	24	6
% of first year students	84	16	0
% of second year students	56	33	11
% of German students	71	26	3
% of Japanese students	69	24	7

Table 4: Impact on future learning strategies

Participants/Impact	Will change learning approach	Will not change learning approach	Undecided
Year 1 students	**54%**	**38%**	**8%**
Year 1 German	74%	26%	0
Year 1 Japanese	33%	50%	17%
Year 2 students	**53%**	**47%**	**0**
Year 2 German	64%	36%	0
Year 2 Japanese	48%	52%	0

Table 5: Attitude towards the inclusion of such activities in future language classes

Participants/Attitude	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Year 1 students	**67%**	**20%**	**13%**
Year 1 German	80%	5%	15%
Year 1 Japanese	53%	37%	10%
Year 2 students	**72%**	**22%**	**6%**
Year 2 German	50%	42%	8%
Year 2 Japanese	83%	13%	4%

Figure 1: Mother Tongues of Participants

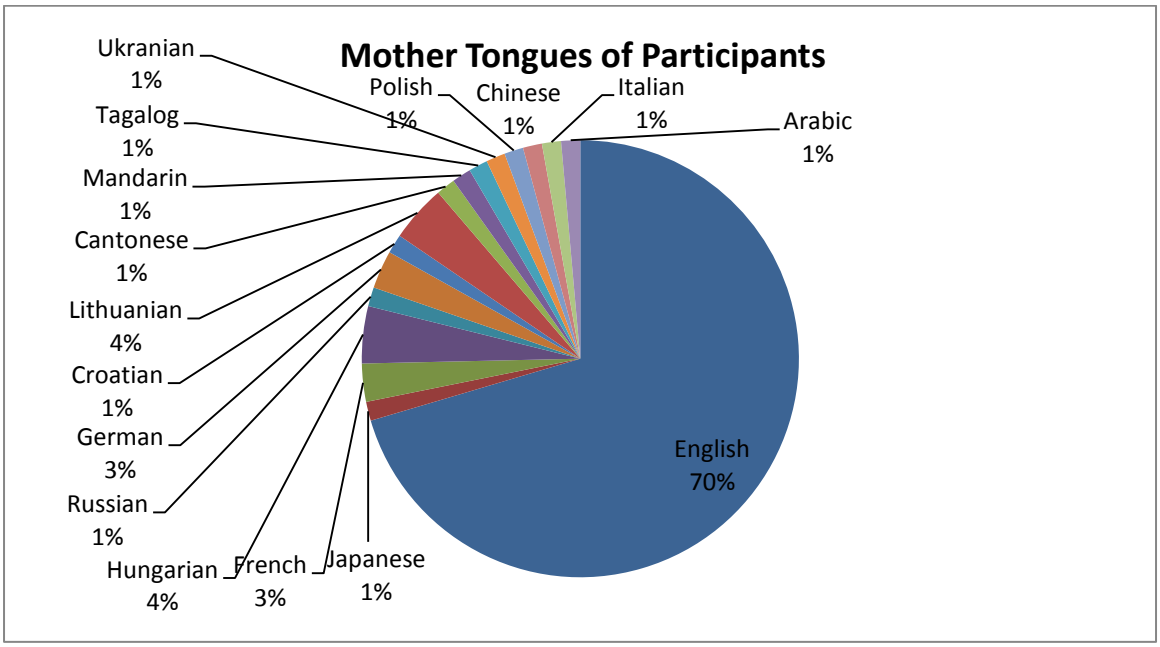


Figure 2: Activities

Year / Target Language	**Activity 1 Grammar Topics**	**Activity 2 Grammar Topics**	**Activity 3 Grammar Topics**	**Activities 1-3 Core pedagogical elements of all activities.**
First year German [100 mins]	Nominative, accusative and dative cases	Word order including position of subject and verb, and conjunctions	Formation of the perfect past tense	1. Lecturer-led introduction to the key points of the grammatical concepts as they function in the target language. 2. Students prepare presentations in small groups comparing the workings of these concepts in the target language and in the other languages they share. 3. Each group presents its findings to its peers. 4. Whole class discussion facilitated by the lecturer
First year Japanese [50 mins]	**S**ubject **O**bject **V**erb (SOV) Word order	Post positions	Formation of relative clauses	
Second year German [50 mins]	Nominative, accusative, dative and genitive cases	Word order including position of subject and verb, conjunctions and relative clauses	Past tense formation including the perfect and the imperfect tenses	
Second year Japanese [50 mins]	Postpositions in the context of case markers	Politeness registers	Causative and passive voice	