

# APPENDIX 4

# Language Diversity and Linguistic Tolerance

Workshop Pestalozzi

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# Outline

- Language diversity:
  - Becoming aware of language variation
  - Becoming aware of language status
  - Becoming aware of what we (do not) know about language(s)
- Linguistic tolerance:
  - Respecting language rights
  - Identification of differences
  - Setting goals for dealing with differences

# Preliminary

- Some risks with dealing with those who cannot speak our language:
  - “Their way of speaking is wrong”
  - “They are unable to talk”
  - “Their way of speaking reflects a different way of thinking”
  - “It is impossible to teach them...”
  - “Our language is more complex.”
  - “Their language is a simplified version of our language.”

# Preliminary

- All these attitudes reflect

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT  
LANGUAGES IN THE WORLD

LACK OF TOLERANCE ABOUT OTHER  
LANGUAGES

# Language diversity (I)

- Languages in the world (in the political sense):

Optimistic counts: +/- 6000 languages

(Wurm, 2001; Comrie, Matthews, Polinsky, orgs., 2003)

11 of these languages are spoken by 70% of the world population

- Around 2500 languages are about to be extinct, according to a recent UNESCO report.

# Language diversity (II)

- 1st (obvious!) conclusion:
  - Our language is not the only language!

# Language diversity (III)

- Human languages are like other entities in nature...
- Legitimate variation with limits



# What is meant by language variation?

- Languages vary:
  - Because they are different
  - Because they change
  - Because we use them in different contexts

# Some differences between languages

- Languages differ in obvious ways:
  - Lexicon – the set of words is different

DOG



PERRO

CHIEN

HOND

# Some differences between languages

- Languages differ in obvious ways:
  - Phonology – the set of sounds is different:

E.g. 5 vowels in Spanish  
14 vowels in European Portuguese

Clicks in several Bantu languages

tense-lax vowel distinction in English

# Some differences between languages

- Languages differ in some less known domains:
  - Morphology – processes for forming new words may differ

3 syllable window for stress in Romance languages

Apparently unlimited compounds in German

e.g. **Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaftskapitänsmütze**  
*the hat of the captain of the Danube Steamboat Shipping Company*

Not all languages mark gender.

# Some differences between languages

- Languages differ in less known domains:

- Syntax: word order is different in different languages

Italian – SVO      German – V2

Turkish – SOV

European Portuguese questions – wh V S

Brazilian Portuguese questions – wh S V

Subject can be null?

Yes – Spanish, Italian, Portuguese

No – French, English, German

Depends on syntactic context – Hebrew, Chinese, Capeverdean

# Some differences between languages

- Languages differ in less obvious ways:
  - Semantics: expression of meanings

Expression of ongoing activities with present, with progressive...

Use of quantifiers (e.g. everybody not...)

# Some differences between languages

- Languages differ in less obvious ways:

- Conventions in writing:

- Comma before *and* in English vs. Portuguese

- Long vs. Short sentences in essays...

- Conventions in use of language:

- How to address people (the pronoun “tu” in different Romance languages)

- How to interact in regular conversations... strategies for interrupting the others.

# Diversity is normal

- Not all differences exist.
- Some patterns are not existent.
- There are linguistic universals and linguistic impossibilities.

VARIATION IN LANGUAGE IS A PRODUCT OF  
NATURE!

# All languages are the same

- They are all natural.
- They all encode certain features.
- They are all acquired spontaneously by children.
- They all encode specific features that other languages don't.

NO LANGUAGE IS MORE  
COMPLEX/HARDER/EASIER/BETTER...

# The point of diversity

- Being aware of language diversity makes us aware of a couple of facts:
  - Different students will have difficulties in specific aspects depending on their native languages.
  - There are specificities of the language we are teaching that require special attention.
  - There are universal features of language that do not require special attention.

# Diversity is language-internal

- There is variation language-internally...
- Obvious facet of language-internal variation: language change.
- Aspects of some unknown languages were present in past stages of our own languages.  
E.g.           English had OV orders  
                  Portuguese had pronouns like French  
                  *en* and *y*
- Language change may be triggered by external factors or not. It is catastrophic (Lightfoot 1999)

# Language-internal variation

- Dialectal variation: language hegemony is artificial.
- We are not aware of all dialectal features.
- E.g. recent European Science Foundation project on Dialect Syntax.

# Language-internal variation

- Sociolectal variation: language differs depending on groups, and we all adapt our register to different social environments.
- There are many prejudices about this:  
E.g. AAVE: I didn't see nothing.
- Standard language is arbitrary variant, not corresponding to what students hear most of the time... (e.g. Portuguese "estar")

# The point of language-internal variation

- Understanding that there is language-internal variation, we become aware of a couple of facts:
  - Variation is an inherent property of language;
  - Teaching a language implies taking decisions on register/context;
  - Our students will display a variable performance in the same way our performance varies according to context.

# Language diversity in school

- How is language diversity explored in schools?
- How do other students deal with the difference?
- What do they know about their schoolmates languages?

# Projects to develop in language class

- How many languages are there in the world?
- How many languages are there in my school?
- Endangered languages...
- Comparing languages in classroom.
- Listening to poetry in other languages.
- Knowing about other literatures.

# From diversity to tolerance

- Acknowledging diversity is the first step to develop an attitude of respect and tolerance.
- What is meant by language tolerance?
  - Accepting that our language is not the only one;
  - Respecting the difficulties of the others with an attitude that encourages the other to continue using the language;
  - Stimulating the use of other languages;
  - Development of language awareness in classroom regarding variation and use.

# Linguistic tolerance

- Linguistic tolerance enhances language teaching?
- YES...
  - Awareness of language-specific difficulties;
  - Awareness of language-specific benefits;
  - Facilitates integration, making learners more “at ease” with language use;
  - Comparative methodologies become possible.

# Linguistic tolerance

- Linguistic tolerance makes it possible to aim at specific goals for language teaching:
  - Language for specific purposes
  - Selection of register being taught
  - ...