

# After English, German. A snapshot, some ideas and six principles

by Anna Maria Curci

The present paper – a report of the workshop that I held at the 2002 Tesol-Italy Convention in Rome – is meant as an attempt to contribute to the definition of the wider concept of multilingual<sup>1</sup> and multicultural competence, as expressed in the Common European Framework:

“Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw.

The customary approach is to present learning a foreign language as an addition, in a compartmentalised way, of a competence to communicate in a foreign language to the competence to communicate in the mother tongue. The concept of plurilingual and pluricultural competence tends to:

- move away from the supposed balanced dichotomy established by the customary L1/L2 pairing by stressing plurilingualism where bilingualism is just one particular case;
- consider that a given individual does not have a collection of distinct and separate competences to communicate depending on the languages he/she knows, but rather a plurilingual and pluricultural competence encompassing the full range of the languages available to him/her;
- stress the pluricultural dimensions of this multiple competence but without necessarily suggesting links between the development of abilities concerned with relating to other cultures and the development of linguistic communication proficiency”<sup>2</sup>.

At the beginning of 2002 Maria Christina Berger, Antonia Gasparro and I were charged by the Goethe Institute Inter Nationes in

Italy with the task of working out a teaching module for beginners of German as a second (or third) foreign language – their first one being English.

In preparing such a module, we could take advantage of our experience as FL teachers and teacher-trainers with a special leaning towards the concept of multilingualism, as well as of the sound basis provided by the work of those who have delved into the field and collected precious materials for years. Among them, I would like to mention Karl-Richard Bausch and his studies on teaching and learning German as a second or third or fourth language; Gerhard Neuner and his ECML<sup>3</sup>-GIIN<sup>4</sup> Project “Learning more than one language efficiently. An example: German after English,” which he has been coordinating with Britta Hufeisen since 1999; other European projects like the Socrates-Lingua A ILTE<sup>5</sup> and, last but not least, Eurocomprehension: “The seven sieves”. All these projects bear witness to the increasing interest for the dimension of plurilingualism. Within the framework thus outlined, our attempt started by focussing on the Italian situation and tried to propose some new pathways in present teaching and learning contexts.

### **German as a foreign language in Italian schools: a snapshot**

Our starting point gives figures showing the recurring ‘constellation’ of GFL<sup>6</sup> learners in Italy. As information papers issued in September 2001 from the former MPI revealed, several Italian students learn German as their second foreign language; 54% of them are students of German as third foreign language. On the other hand, the weekly amount of FL lessons in most school curricula is becoming smaller and smaller. The need for effective teaching approaches has therefore increased. Some reflections can help us to find a way out of such objective difficulties.

First of all, let’s focus on the target group. Students of German as a 2nd or 3rd FL

- are older than, say, the average EFL beginner,

- have a wider “knowledge of the world,”
- have already had more “life experiences,”
- know their own “learning style,”
- have had the opportunity to enhance their study skills.

Nevertheless, there are still many problems left; and I dare say that the real problem lies in us, the teachers, insofar as there is hardly any professional sharing between Italian teachers and FL teachers, approaches and methods are often very different, and FL teachers sometimes do not know other foreign languages.

## Some ideas

Let's look at some sentences from the Common European Framework:

“... plurilingual and pluricultural competence promotes the development of linguistic and communication awareness, and even metacognitive strategies which enable the social agent to become more aware of and control his or her own "spontaneous" ways of handling tasks and in particular their linguistic dimension. In addition, this experience of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism:

- exploits pre-existing *sociolinguistic and pragmatic components*, which in turn develops them further;
- leads to a better perception of what is general and what is specific concerning the linguistic organisation of different languages (form of metalinguistic, interlinguistic or so to speak "hyperlinguistic" awareness);
- by its nature refines knowledge of how to learn and the capacity to enter into relations with others and new situations.

It may, therefore, to some degree accelerate subsequent learning in the linguistic and cultural areas. This is the case even if plurilingual and pluricultural competence is "uneven" and if proficiency in a particular language remains "partial"<sup>7</sup>.

## Spelling

and intonation, phonetic characteristics<sup>8</sup> – while comparing both phonological systems I found out there are very few sounds that do not appear in both languages – some grammar items (possessive adjectives: *his son = sein Sohn, her son = ihr Sohn*; comparatives and superlatives: *long, longer, the longest*, to be compared with *lang, länger, am längsten*; strong verbs: *sing sang sung = singen sang gesungen*), a large section of vocabulary<sup>9</sup>, word formation principles (suffixes: *helpless = hilflos*, compound words: *school book = Schulbuch*). All these elements, which stress the affinities between German and English are an almost endless source of ideas for exercises, activities, strategies to be enhanced, and so they were for us, not only while working on our module but also in testing it in our classes of beginners.

## Principles<sup>10</sup>

### **1. Cognitive teaching and learning: comparing languages and speaking of them**

A cognitive slant on teaching and learning implies the awareness of the processes which take place in our mind when we learn a foreign language. Such processes are speechless: they take place without any external and objective evidence<sup>11</sup>.

A suitable approach might embrace the discussion of such unspoken processes, their similarities (e.g. examples of anglicisms, internationally-used terms, cognates) and differences (in grammar and vocabulary, e.g. false friends). The discussion would refer not only to the learning product, with such questions as: “What have you just done/performed?,” “What sort of activity was it?,” but also to the learning process: “How did you do that?,” “How can you do it better?” As a result, a feeling for languages and the language is developed, so that we can eventually speak of *language awareness*, and also of *language learning awareness* in a multilingual perspective.

## **2. Focus on comprehension. From comprehension to production**

Comprehension in a parallel English-German teaching – and in every multilingual curriculum, of course - includes several aspects. For example:

- recognizing and evaluating language affinities, which can give the clue to the meaning of a German word, because it is a cognate (e.g. *offen* – *open*)
- developing and enhancing comprehension strategies, especially reading comprehension strategies (e.g.: finding out key words in a text and talking about the process of identifying key words).

Language production can be enhanced by speaking of these processes and of cultural contents in a cross-cultural approach.

## **3. Content-based teaching and learning**

The easy access to different everyday life topics with the help of vocabulary common to both English and German frees FL teaching and learning from 'kindergarten themes' and stresses the importance of semantics since the very first moments of the FL learning process. Students have the opportunity of discussing topics that they find familiar and appealing (an example: music, see *Appendix B*) and that enhance motivation and the experience of successful language learning.

## **4. Text-oriented approach**

The 'new world' of foreign language, culture and civilization comes to students through every possible kind of text – reading and listening texts, pictures, videos, websites - which we can often combine. A text-oriented teaching approach can perform various tasks. Among them, it can help

- working out a language system for German out of a comparative analysis of parallel texts in English and in German;
- developing comprehension strategies, especially reading strategies, from global to selective comprehension.

## **5. Saving time and energy: learning to learn efficiently**

Through an aware, constant reference to the English language our students can

- learn a great amount of new words in a short time (the learning group could use or develop a *pictorial dictionary* in both foreign languages);
- understand grammar items by comparing English and German with each other, and also with other languages;
- point out similarities and differences in pronunciation and spelling.

## **6. Making students active**

An efficient strategy seems to be the S-O-S (in English: C-A-S-) Strategy: S= *Sammeln* (collecting); O= *Ordnen* (arranging) and S= *Systematisieren* (systematizing), on our way to preparing and enhancing lifelong learning.

One more quotation from the Common European Framework seems to provide a synthesis of what FL-teaching research has devised and performed up to now, as well as a starting point for what a didactics of plurilingualism that still has to be worked out – in other words, a new approach which goes “from the partial to the transversal”:

“Between "related" languages in particular - though not just between these - knowledge and skills are transferred by a kind of osmosis. And, with reference to curricula, it should be stressed that:

- all knowledge of a language is partial, however much of a "mother tongue" or "native language" it seems to be. It is always incomplete both in so far as it could never be as developed or perfect in an ordinary individual as it would be for the utopian, 'idealised' speaker, and also because a given individual never has equal mastery of the different component parts of the language in question for example (of oral and written skills, or of comprehension and interpretation and production skills);

- any partial knowledge is also more complete than it might seem: for instance, in order to achieve the "limited" goal of increasing understanding of specialised texts in a given foreign language on very familiar subjects it is necessary to acquire knowledge and skills which could also be used for many other purposes;

- those who have learnt one language also know a great deal about many other languages without necessarily realising that they do; the learning of other languages generally facilitates the activation of this knowledge and increases awareness of it, which is a factor to be taken into account rather than proceeding as if it did not exist.

Although leaving a very broad freedom of choice in drawing up curricula and progression, these different principles and observations also aim to encourage efforts to adopt a transparent and coherent approach when identifying options and making decisions.<sup>12</sup>

## Appendix A. Phonological systems: a comparison

### Arbeitsblatt Phonetik

#### Vokale

English	Deutsch	Italiano
	Arm	
arm		
fine	fein	
house	Haus	
bad		
bed, elegant	Melodie, elegant	
	leben	
game		
about	Klasse	
girl		
	Bett, Gäste	
bear	Bär	
jungle		
if	Kind	
he, bean	ihr, wir	
here	Papier	
low, no, boat		
long	oft	
short		
	Bohne	
boil	neun	
	Köln	
	hör	
put	Musik	
	Mutter	
too, you	Schule	
sure, poor		
	München	



## Arbeitsblatt Phonetik

### Konsonanten

English	Deutsch	Italiano
body	lebendig	
human	ich, zwanzig	
hard	Dose	
friend, father	Freund, Vater	
garden, gold	Garten, Geld	
bring	bringen	
hate, house	hassen, Haus	
yes, Indian	je, ja, Jahr	
catch, silk	Kind, bequem, Zug	
long, still	lang, still	
milk, come	Milch, kommen	
no, new	nein, neu	
paper	Papier, ab	
rare		
	rot	
seldom	Sauce, essen, Fuß	
shop, social	Geschäft, charmant	
tea	Tee, Rad	
child	Deutsch	
	Zeit	
very	wer, Olive	
these, crazy	Sonne, crazy	
pleasure	Journalist	
jam, Job	Job, Dschungel	
thank, death		
mother, this		
	Nacht	

## Appendix B: After English, German: some ideas

### LERNEINHEIT 5: MUSIK NON STOP

In questa unità esplorerai alcuni aspetti del mondo della musica e, con l'aiuto del confronto con la lingua inglese, rifletterai sulla formazione delle parole composte e sulle desinenze dell'aggettivo come attributo. Un testo, presentato parallelamente in lingua tedesca e in lingua inglese, sarà infine l'occasione per esercitare la lettura globale e la lettura selettiva.

#### 1. Kraftwerk

„Kraftwerk“ ist das deutsche Wort für „Power station“. In der Welt der deutschen Musik identifiziert man aber seit über 30 Jahren diesen Name mit der Gruppe aus Düsseldorf, die mit „Krautrock“ begann und die elektronische Musik ‚neu‘ komponierte. Unten findest du die Titel vieler Schallplatten und CDs der Gruppe „Kraftwerk“. Einige sind in englischer, andere in deutscher Sprache, so wie die Texte der Songs.

„Kraftwerk“ è il corrispondente in tedesco della parola inglese “Power station”. Nel mondo della musica tedesca, “Kraftwerk” significa da oltre 30 anni il gruppo di Düsseldorf, che ha iniziato con il cosiddetto “Krautrock” e ha rivoluzionato la musica elettronica, dandole un nuovo volto. Di seguito trovi copertine e titoli di molti dischi e CD del gruppo. Alcuni sono in inglese, altri in tedesco, così come i testi delle canzoni.

1. a. Kombiniere die Titel links mit den Namen rechts

Associa i titoli alle parole della colonna a destra.

Die richtige Kombination ist: 1g, ...

a. Kraftwerk 1	1. Mensch-Maschine
b. Kraftwerk 2	2. Computerwelt
c. Ralf & Florian	3. Trans Europa Express
d. Autobahn	4. Der Mix
e. Radioactivity	5. Power station 1
f. TEE	6. Motorway
g. Man machine	7. Radioaktivität
h. Computer world	8. Power station 2
i. Electric café	9. Elektrisches Café
j. The mix	10. Ralf und Florian

1. b. Welche Komposita hast du im Text gefunden? Ergänze die Tabelle!

Quali parole composte hai trovato nel testo? Completa la tabella.

Deutsch	Englisch	Italienisch
Autobahn	motorway	

#### 1. c. Denk nach! Rifletti!

Le parole composte in tedesco si compongono con un criterio analogo rispetto alla lingua inglese: il termine principale è indicato per \_\_\_\_\_, mentre in italiano spesso questo appare al primo posto. Troviamo così in tedesco

der Taschenrechner    corrispondente all'inglese    pocket calculator

das Kraftwerk    corrispondente all'inglese    power station

### 1. d. Pass auf! Fa' attenzione!

Avrai sicuramente notato una differenza nell'ortografia delle parole composte in lingua tedesca e in lingua inglese: in tedesco le parole composte, **Komposita**, vengono scritte come un'unica parola, mentre in inglese questo non avviene sempre. Ricordi la prima unità di apprendimento? Lì hai incontrato

der Lippenstift                      corrispondente all'inglese                      *lipstick*

ma anche

der Lidschatten                      corrispondente all'inglese                      *eye shadow*

### 1. e.

Torna a riflettere sulla composizione delle parole prese in esame:

das Auto + die Bahn = die Autobahn

die Kraft + das Werk = das Kraftwerk

die Tasche + n+ der Rechner = der Taschenrechner

Qual è il genere della parola composta?

La parola composta ha di norma il genere dell' \_\_\_\_\_ elemento "in ordine di apparizione".

Ancora una volta si evidenzia l'importanza di imparare i sostantivi con l'articolo corrispondente!

## 2. POCKET CALCULATOR

Il gruppo "Kraftwerk" ha scritto e composto due versioni, una in inglese e una in tedesco, dell'album "The Mix". Di seguito trovi versi tratti dai brani *Die Roboter*, *Computerliebe* e *Taschenrechner...* che devi completare, confrontando le due versioni.

### Die Roboter

Wir laden unsere Batterie  
Jetzt sind \_\_\_\_ voller Energie  
\_\_\_\_\_ sind die \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_ \_\_ allein, ganz allein  
starre auf den Fernsehschirm, Fernsehschirm  
hab' wieder nichts zu tun  
\_\_ brauche ein Rendezvous  
\_\_\_\_\_ liebe.

\_\_\_\_\_ bin der Musikant  
mit Taschenrechner in der Hand.

### The robots

We charged the power of \_\_\_\_\_  
And now we'\_\_ full of \_\_\_\_\_  
We are the robots.

### Computer love

I'm alone tonight  
stare at the TV screen, \_\_\_\_\_  
I don't know what to \_\_\_\_\_  
I need \_\_ rendez-vous  
\_\_\_\_\_.

### Pocket calculator

I'm the operator  
of my \_\_\_\_\_.

### Denk nach! Rifletti!

Was ist gleich/ähnlich? Was ist anders?

Metti a confronto vocaboli e strutture, evidenzia somiglianze e differenze e discutine in classe.

(wir/we; ich bin/ I'm; allein/alone; ich starre/ I stare; ich brauche/ I need; Fernsehschirm/TV screen; Taschenrechner/ pocket calculator)

## References

BAUSCH, Karl-Richard and Heid, Manfred (eds.), *Das Lehren und Lernen von Deutsch als zweiter oder weiterer Fremdsprache: Spezifika, Probleme, Perspektiven*, Bochum, 1990

BERGER, Maria Cristina, CURCI, Anna Maria, and GASPARRO, Antonia, *Good + gut = ottimo. Ein Modul für die ersten 30 Stunden Deutschunterricht an italienischen Schulen*, Herausgegeben vom Goethe-Institut Mailand, 2003

COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *Common European Framework for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Strasbourg: Council for Cultural Co-operation Education Committee Modern Languages Division, 2001

HUFEISEN, Britta and NEUNER, Gerhard, (eds.) *Tertiärsprachen lernen und lernen. Beispiel: Deutsch nach Englisch*“, München, Goethe Institut Inter Nationes, 2000 (Erprobungsfassung)

MACKIEWICZ, Wolfgang, “Plurilingualism in the European Knowledge Society”, unpublished paper given at the conference on “Lingue e produzione del sapere,” organised by the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences, Lugano, Università della Svizzera Italiana, 14 June 2002

NEUNER, Gerhard, „Mehrsprachigkeitskonzept (und Tertiärsprachendidaktik) auch in Italien? Beispiel: Englisch als erste und Deutsch als zweite Fremdsprache“, *Pervoi*, Januar bis Juni 2003

ONNIS, Luca, *On processing language in real time: fluency in native and non-native speakers. A cognitive approach to bilinguals' ultimate level of attainment*, in: CARLI, Augusto (ed.), *Aspetti linguistici e interculturali del bilinguismo*. Milano: Franco Angeli, 2001

RICHARDS, Jack C., PLATT, John, and PLATT, Heidi. *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics*. 2nd ed. London: Longman, 1992

---

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Common European Framework (Chapter 1) makes a distinction between 'multilingualism' and 'plurilingualism': "plurilingualism" refers to a complex competence, whereas "multilingualism" seems rather to be used to stress the concept of 'addition', of co-existence of several languages in a society, or of juxtaposition of separated competences in different languages. This distinction, which can be understood very well by Italian and German speakers ("multilinguismo" versus "plurilinguismo", "Vielsprachigkeit versus "Mehrsprachigkeit"), does not seem to be so clear-cut in English. As Wolfgang Mackiewicz of the European Language Council remarked in his paper at the Conference on "Lingue e produzione del sapere" (Lugano, June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2002), "the word 'plurilingualism' does not form part of the English vocabulary" (Mackiewicz 2002). The *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics* gives the following definition for the adjective 'multilingual:': "a person who knows and uses three or more languages. Usually, a multi-lingual does not know all the languages equally well. For example, he or she may:

*a* speak and understand one language best

*b* be able to write in only one

*c* use each language in different types of situation, e.g. one language at home, one at work, and one for shopping

*d* use each language for different communicative purposes, e.g. one language for talking about science, one for religious purposes, and one for talking about personal feelings." (Richards-Platt 1992: 238).

In Chapter 6.1.3.1 of the European Framework, where plurilingual competence is defined as an 'uneven' competence with different competence profiles, we can find an echo of the Longman Dictionary sentence "a multi-lingual does not speak languages equally well." I have therefore decided to use both terms alternatively with the same "complex" and "composite" meaning.

<sup>2</sup> Council of Europe 2001, Chapter 8.1

<sup>3</sup> European Center for Modern Languages in Graz

<sup>4</sup> Goethe Institute Inter Nationes

<sup>5</sup> Intercomprehension in Language Teacher Education

<sup>6</sup> German as a foreign language

<sup>7</sup> Council of Europe 2001, Chapter 6.1.3.3

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix A

<sup>9</sup> As early as in 1993 Britta Hufeisen made a list of the common English-German vocabulary with at least 600 words. On the other hand, we should not forget that there is a long list of 'false friends', too. In a concept of multilingualism, interference and interlanguage are considered an important step in the language learning process.

<sup>10</sup> They were worked out in German in a piece of groupwork during a meeting of the ECML-GIIN- Project under the supervision of Britta Hufeisen and Gerhard Neuner. In translating them into English, I added some reflections of mine.

<sup>11</sup> In his essay "On processing language in real time" Luca Onnis recalls the basic postulate of Anderson's ACT (Adaptive Control of Thought) theory, which states that "all cognitive behaviour is controlled by production rules. A production rule specifies the steps of cognition and is represented in the theory in the form of IF-THEN statements.". Since learning is seen as a dynamic process of reorganization of knowledge, two processes – knowledge compilation and tuning – and five learning mechanisms – composition and proceduralisation for the former, generalisation, discrimination, strengthening as for the latter - are proposed. A look into Anderson's multistage, multimechanism theory of cognitive skill acquisition and into connectionist models can be useful for our research.

<sup>12</sup> Council of Europe 2001, Chapter 8.2.2.