Language and integration: when federal programme’s designers redefine the teaching-learning relationship

Since 2000, many studies on legal frameworks of European countries have highlighted a strong relationship between language education for immigrants and their “cultural integration” (Extramiana, 2012). In Switzerland, the federal government formalizes this link by considering the acquisition of linguistic ability as an indicator of a “good” integration. The link is formulated not only in the legal framework, but also in public policy and specific programmes aimed at teaching the language of the host society to immigrants as integral to a process of integration. Currently, a governmental programme called “label fide” is being developed. The aim is namely to increase the quality of language courses for immigrants. This programme is based on the idea that courses be structured around the immigrants’ “needs” and real social practices.

This approach, based on a task-oriented and conversationalist perspective, is in line with criticisms of other perspectives of teaching that focus only on the metalinguistic dimension of language. This approach seeks to provide the tools that the immigrants need in their integration (Calinon, 2013; Renaud, 2001). In so doing, it deeply affects the traditional representation about the roles of the different actors of the teaching-learning relationship, and in particular the role of the teacher.

In this paper, we adopt a sociocultural perspective on the psychology of education, which considers tensions occurring between the different representations and meanings developed by the actors of an educational programme (Muller Mirza & Perret-Clermont, 2016). We are particularly interested in the tension around the different representations of the role of the teacher formulated by the designers of the programme. We hypothesize that these representations also affect the process of implementation of the programme itself.

In order to analyse these representations and their interplay, we will examine data gathered in the frame of audio and video recorded interactions among the programme’s designers during the process of conceptualizing the programme. A discursive analysis of a meeting of three hours will focus on the use of “categories”, considered as that which is done in talk to accomplish some social actions (Edwards, 1991). In particular, we will analyse which “membership categorizations” of teachers’ roles emerge in the interactions between the programme’s designers (Sacks, 1972).

The preliminary results show a tension between two “membership categorizations”: the “teacher as a transmitter” and the “teacher as a facilitator”. Interestingly, besides the representations of the teacher, it is the representations
of the designers themselves that appear, as “evaluators” and/or “advisors” of the teachers. Furthermore, while the programme claims the immigrants to be the principal beneficiaries, their perspective seldom seems taken into consideration.

These results will mainly contribute to the exploration of the processes related to the conception and implementation of language education in the field of cultural integration. By shedding light on some of the psychosocial processes at stake, it is also an opportunity critically to discuss the relationship too often taken as granted between integration and acquisition of language.

References


