The Learner Development Journal Issue 5: Engaging with the Multilingual Turn for Learner Development: Practices, Issues, Discourses, and Theorisations

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Title: Multilingualism in the Foreign Language Classroom: The Curious Case of French in Mumbai.

Date of publication online: 2021

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The APA citation reference for this paper is:

Badrinathan, V. (2021). Multilingualism in the foreign language classroom: The curious case of French in Mumbai. In A. Barfield, O. Cusen, Y. Imamura, & R. Kelly (Eds.), *The Learner Development Journal Issue 5: Engaging with the Multilingual Turn for Learner Development: Practices, Issues, Discourses, and Theorisations* (pp. 9–24). Tokyo: The Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) Learner Development Special Interest Group.

Multilingualism in the Foreign Language Classroom: The Curious Case of French in Mumbai

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This narrative account attempts to understand how multilingualism is handled within a foreign language classroom (French) in the linguistically heterogeneous city of Mumbai. Multilingualism in the area of foreign language learning in India remains typically unnoticed. Using the narrative inquiry approach, this study explores the lived experience of six teachers of French. While the narratives offer a first-hand introspective view of the teachers' own relationship with languages and their linguistic identities, they also reveal the minimal space for multilingual approach within the classroom. Teacher beliefs, language learning processes and sociocultural factors impact the teachers' understanding and use of languages inside the classroom. While some teachers are not hostile to inducting a multilingual approach in their pedagogy, they do so with reluctance and hesitation. This also points to the urgent need for strengthening awareness of multilingual strategies and calls for an acknowledgement of the linguistic richness in the foreign language classroom of Mumbai.

このナラティブ・アカウントは，言語的に異質な都市であるムンバイの外国語教室（フランス語）で，多言語主義がどのように扱われているかを理解しようとするものである。インドでは，外国語学習の分野における多言語は，ほとんど注目されていない。本研究では，ナラティブ・インクワイアリー手法を用いて，6人のフランス語教師の生きた　を探る。このナラティブは，教師自身の言語との関係や言語的アイデンティティを　省的に示す一方で，教室　での多言語アプローチのための限られたスペースを明らかにしている。教師のビリーフ，言語学習プロセス，社会文化的要因が，教室　での言語の理解と使用に影響を与えている。教師の中には，自分の教授法に多言語アプローチを導入することに反感を抱かない一方，消極的で躊躇してしまう者もいる。このことは，多言語　略の認識を強化することが早急に必要であることを指摘しており，ムンバイの外国語教室における言語の豊かさを認知することが求められている。

Cet article porte sur la place du plurilinguisme au sein de l'enseignement-apprentissage du français langue étrangère à Mumbai, ville hétérogène et multilingue. Le plurilinguisme par rapport aux langues étrangères reste un domaine peu étudié dans le contexte indien. En s'appuyant sur l'enquête narrative, cet article retrace le vécu de six enseignants de français langue étrangère à Mumbai. D'un côté, les enquêtes narratives permettent de comprendre le rapport que les enseignants partagent avec les langues et leur identité linguistique. De l'autre, elles révèlent également la place négligée de l'approche plurilingue en classe de langue. Ce qui ouvre la discussion vers un nécessaire renforcement des stratégies plurilingues et une reconnaissance de la richesse linguistique en classe au service des langues étrangères, ici plus spécifiquement dans le contexte de Mumbai.

Keywords

multilingualism, narrative inquiry, multilingual teaching strategies, French as a foreign language, Mumbai

多言語主義, ナラティブ・インクワイアリー, 多言語教育ストラテジー, 外国語としてのフランス語, ムンバイ

plurilinguisme, enquête narrative, stratégies d'enseignement multilingues, français langue étrangère, Mumbai

In this narrative account, I study the narratives of six French language teachers in Mumbai city. Thereby I hope to gain an insight into the understanding of the concept of multilingualism by these teachers, as well as their classroom pedagogy involving French and the other languages. At the outset I would like to briefly retrace my own personal experiences with languages, with learning French, and with multilingualism. Subsequently, I shall provide three vignettes relating to language in the educational space in order to contextualize this study. Further I shall proceed to the teacher narratives and their analysis.

I myself speak with fluency more than three Indian languages, in addition to English and French. At home in Mumbai, I grew up speaking Tamil. English was always a part of my reading, writing world, and my education, so in other words it was a "second first language" if I could use that term. I speak, read, and write Hindi and Marathi with ease, the latter being the regional language of the state of Maharashtra where Mumbai is situated. I also speak a smattering of imperfect Gujarati (language of the neighbouring state Gujarat, commonly heard in Mumbai) and Malayalam (language of the Southern state of Kerala to which I was exposed in my early years). I later studied Spanish and Russian at some point of my life. I began learning French in school, was fascinated by the language, and continued further to acquire my degrees of specialization in this language. As I did not learn my first language Tamil at school, I learnt to read and write the language with external coaching. Besides teaching, I seriously engage with Indian classical music and on this front, I am constantly handling a wide lyrical repertoire in several Indian languages. This is the multilingual self that I am as an individual and as a language teacher.

Having provided this brief autobiography that contributes to my own understanding of multilingualism, I shall now proceed to present the three vignettes I spoke about at the beginning, as a means to contextualize this study. The first is the reminiscence of a teacher who taught me language in school, the second speaks of an Indian film and its relevance to languages and the third of my own personal journey as a teacher towards a broader and empowering perspective of multilingualism.

While at school, I learnt Marathi the local language which was compulsory until a certain level before exercising an option to choose French. My Marathi teacher enjoyed the language she taught, spoke often to us in Marathi and explained poetry in simple Marathi that I still remember and cherish. Marathi being close to Hindi in script and vocabulary, a language which is widely spoken in India, it was not difficult for most students in the class to understand and draw from their linguistic resources. The teacher would use English and some Hindi as an intermediary to explain. Somewhere in my mind, these classes had a profound experience on me. Decades later as I look back on the Marathi classes, I understand why they impacted me. Marathi is a regional language, spoken by many in the city of Mumbai, often heard on the streets, and a common language of a large majority of the domestic workers or house maids that many families employ. Teaching Marathi through Marathi with a touch of English and Hindi was the right blend to teach a regional language. It was not an all–English class nor was it an all–Marathi class. The hegemony of English was shattered and a space, though small, yet powerful, was created for regional Marathi in a non–invasive way. Although the teaching style was traditional, which was not surprising given that this was the late 70s, the teacher was avant–garde in the sense as she made all comfortable with her explanations, balanced the known languages (English, Hindi) with the target language (Marathi), encouraged the students to think of equivalents in Hindi and make connections with known cultural symbols. She used her own multilingual background (Marathi, Hindi, English) to construct supporting knowledge for her multilingual students through their languages. Although I cannot meet this teacher today unfortunately to understand her thought processes, I would certainly conclude that her positive beliefs about the language she taught underpinned her teaching methodology. She knew how to harness the languages that the class had, she gently dismantled the binary approach of English and the other language as well as a purely monolingual approach to teaching and learning Marathi. This example remains with me as an abiding model of expanding boundaries of language teaching and creating a space for multilingualism within the class.

The second vignette that I wish to present is from an award–winning Indian film, Newton (Masurkar, 2017). The film is set in rural India, against the backdrop of the Indian national

elections. A team of election officers attempts to set up a polling booth in a violent and disturbed rural belt, home to forest tribal people. One of the polling officers is a local girl, who otherwise by profession is a school teacher in the same belt. At one point, she describes her daily work and expresses how difficult it is for her school children to understand the text books, as they are in Hindi, whereas the children speak and are familiar with Gondi, the local, home language. Gondi is the language spoken by the aboriginal peoples or the Gonds from the central and south-central regions of India. So, as a teacher familiar with this language which is also her own, she explains the content to the school students in Gondi. This anecdote from the film reveals two distinctive elements—negligence or disdain towards the local language and an institutionalized instructional strategy that is unidimensional. The other element, the more positive one, and very relevant to this study, is the effort by the teacher to bring in the familiar language, making learning meaningful for her audience through linguistic familiarity. Multilingualism is thus present not just in the classroom, in the city, and in my own life experience, but is also part of public discourse and modern media offering different perspectives as the film sequence shows.

I now move on to discussing my own experience as a teacher of French. When I began teaching French as a foreign language in Mumbai more than three decades ago, as a young novice teacher, I was altogether enchanted with the idea of the foreign tongue—the mystery, the exoticism it offered, and above all, in the depth of my mind, the unpronounced, implicit norm of the native teacher. This meant, teach in French, speak in French and try to emulate the native speaker model.

Trying to reach up to this model amongst other things, meant speaking the right way, with the "correct" accent and imitating the famous melodious French rhythm. Equipped with meagre experience and eager to learn and experiment, as a young teacher, the only path I could fall upon was my own experience with learning French. And this was through the medium of English. Thus, English became the via media for negotiating what could not be transferred effectively through French. This was the norm that became the mirror for my early teaching practices. In juxtaposition with my Indian experience of learning French through English, I would place a French-only pedagogy, which was prevalent in the courses taught by French native teachers, and which I took at the Alliance Française, a French-run institute for learning French. As I grew and matured as a teacher, the difference between the two approaches struck me. On the one hand, there was the Indian model that used English in order to teach French (not forgetting the fact that French, or any foreign language education is offered only in institutions of English-medium instruction). On the other, there was the imported model of teaching French through French. Let us admit that the latter was certainly more effective in acquiring spoken skills and pronunciation, but far less practical in the mainstream educational context of India. Grappling between the two models, and my incapability to surmount this dilemma, I took the middle path. I taught for around five years in a bilingual model, French through French when possible but more often than not, French through English. Only two languages existed in my class—French and English.

The "multilingual turn" for me took place some years later through unexpected quarters— firstly my own class and secondly, a colleague's class. Back then, I confronted problems of pronunciation with French for the learners. Those gifted for phonetics grabbed the nuances of French without difficulty. The challenge was for the rest, who struggled with sounds that were foreign to them and mispronounced them by grafting Indian phonetic sounds on them, which is a common phenomenon. While I tried to find efficient ways of dealing with this pedagogically, I stumbled upon a student who was faithfully transcribing the pronunciation in his notebook into Tamil, his home language, for better understanding. Finding this to be a brilliant idea, from that moment onwards I began integrating Indian languages that

learners were familiar with, to transcribe baffling French pronunciations. This came with fairly satisfactory results. The second occurrence was, when walking past a class, I noticed and heard a colleague putting up the pronunciation of a French sentence in Hindi on the board. This was met with large-scale criticism. The stigma of using one language to teach another reinforcing the "holier than thou" monolingual norm awoke in me the awareness of the hegemony of the "one language" model in language classes together with the implicit ostracizing of the other languages present in situ, thereby making the learner feel inadequate for possessing those languages, even if indirectly.

The above three scenarios that I have presented bring out the scene of teaching in India—often a tug-of-war between target language and the other languages in question or between language and the subject matter, as in the film (Masurkar, 2017). There is an inherent paradox here that I would like to highlight. Indians are rarely monolingual. They know and use at least two languages right from birth if not more. Hence, learning a foreign language alongside should not be problematic. But the underlying current of high and low languages along with the inherent sociolinguistic hierarchy based on negative discrimination around such individual and societal heteroglossia comes into play. Those having non-English education are referred to as "the vernaculars" ot the "vernacs," or coming from the "vernacular medium" which has taken on a derogatory sense probably since colonial times in India when the British started categorising major Indian languages as vernacular (see Mishra, 2020). This widely-used terminology is discriminatory and pushes local and regional languages to the margins. The other issue to contend with is a pedagogical one. Learning French becomes easier if one has prior knowledge of English, given that both languages share some commonalities. In this process, those not comfortable with English are left behind in the race. They either do not opt to learn a foreign language, and even if they do, they find themselves at a disadvantage as compared to the English language speakers who advance faster. This approach also raises issues of inclusivity through the language framework.

This initial lead-in helps foreground the teacher narratives that follow in the second half of this narrative account. I shall now present my research design before moving on to a brief exposition of the sociolinguistic fabric of Mumbai city, of the notion of multilingualism itself, and finally to the teacher narratives themselves.

The Research Design—Looking Closely at Narrative Enquiry

It has been my concern to address the role of languages other than the target language, in this case, teaching French in Mumbai. This is inextricably linked to the teacher as a person, his or her beliefs, their journey with languages, perceptions relating to language, and the relationship between being, negotiating between languages, and teaching one of them. How do they perceive languages? As porous, non-water-tight, breathing freely, and developing in a healthy language ecology, or as individually separate entities that do not engage with each other?

I rely upon the narratives of six teachers teaching French in the city of Mumbai to understand their perspectives about the language they teach, the languages they and their students know, and the convergent space which is the classroom. These teachers (all of them women purely by coincidence) whose age range is between 34–60, speak about their lived experiences, their relationship with languages, and French language teaching. Some of these teachers were born and raised in Mumbai, and some came into the city later. All of them know and use several languages in their daily lives. They have grown up with some languages, adopted some others along the way, and share a varied relationship with these languages. The teachers work in diverse settings—school, college, university—and their professional experience ranges from 10 to 36 years.

I prefer the word discussion rather than interview as it sets the stage for narration; interviews implicitly set a hierarchy and thereby a barrier. What are the languages the teachers know and use? Do they use these languages in the French class? How did they learn French? What determines their instructional practice? Can they draw upon the languages of the learners and their own to teach French? Through these and other questions, I intend to explore the language biographies of these teachers, their linguistic repertoires, and the interrelationship between languages, teaching, knowledge creation through the multilingual frame, and the multilingual identity. The main frames of discussion include the biographical dimension of the teachers dealing with multiple languages, their own language learning trajectory, and finally their role and experience with multilingualism within the French language classroom.

In discussing in depth with these teachers, I hoped to establish a free-flowing chain of thought where they would speak without inhibitions and without succumbing to the pressure of giving the "right or correct answers." What I am interested in here is the possibility of looking closely at teacher narratives and how this impacts their classroom approaches towards language teaching. In doing so, I wish to establish a "dialogic relation" between the interviewer and the interviewee so that the free flow of thoughts and ideas is generated without obstacles and the participants speak willingly and freely of their journeys. I have known some of these participants for several years, and this personal relationship made it easy for them to speak without inhibitions. All the semi-structured discussions took place over the telephone due to the pandemic crisis.

In undertaking a narrative enquiry methodology, I wish first to understand the "languaged lives" (Ellis, 2016) of French language teachers. As I said earlier, most Indians use two or more languages in their daily lives. Therefore French language teachers also navigate between multiple languages—home languages (for not always is just one spoken at home), languages at work, languages at the marketplace and so on. The workplace may restrict them to one language at an official level, usually English. However, the other languages they deal with and the relationship with all of these contributes to a language teacher identity that I hope to comprehend through the narratives. Before I proceed, I would like to dwell briefly on the notion of multilingualism and the sociolinguistic fabric of Mumbai, which frames my study.

The Sociolinguistic Context of Mumbai City

In order to understand this study it is imperative to throw light, albeit briefly, on the sociolinguistic fabric of India and the city of Mumbai. The Indian constitution recognises 22 scheduled languages (officially recognised in the 8th schedule of the Indian constitution). Besides the scheduled languages, as many as 99 non-scheduled languages with several dialects under each of these languages are also mentioned in the constitution. Indian sociolinguist Pandit (1972) provides the classic and much quoted example of the Indian multilingual mosaic.

> A Gujarati spice merchant in Bombay uses Kathiawadi (a dialect of Gujarati), with his family, Marathi (the local language) in the vegetable market, Kachi and Konkani in trading circles, Hindi or Hindustani with the milkman and at the train station, and even English on formal occasions. Such a person may not be highly educated or well versed in linguistic rules but knows enough to be able to use the language(s) for his purposes. (p. 79)

This exemplary situation of a linguistically heterogeneous Mumbai (as Bombay is known today), holds true even today. It is further complicated by frequent code switching and

varieties of Hinglish (mix of Hindi and English in colloquial usage) in formal and informal discourse that have found a place in the current linguistic reality of the city.

English has a strong presence in India and its educational system, alongside Hindi, both of which are recognised as official languages, not to mention the regional official languages of the different states in India. English dominates as the language of higher education, although it still remains a language of urban and metropolitan areas. The hegemony of English in the hierarchy of languages is undisputed, often creating a secondary position for regional languages that I have mentioned before.

Urban multilingualism has been described as "a crisscrossing network of many different languages co-existing in the same space" (Siemund et al., 2013, p. 4), and this resonates with Mumbai, one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse cities of the world. Vertovec (2007) refers to a "super-diversity" (in an European context of migration), which has been readily adapted into a "linguistic superdiversity" (Duarte & Gogolin, 2013). In a context such as Mumbai, the dynamic and complex interplay of languages can lend itself to the concept of a superdiversity of languages. As the city grew into a financial stronghold and cinema capital of the country, the diversity of its populace was enriched. This brought in a plethora of languages and cultures especially palpable in Mumbai's ethnolinguistic enclaves, which are interesting spaces in themselves (Chik et al., 2018). Today this diversity has grown multifold, adding to its complexity of cultures and languages. As King and Carson (2016) argue, the city space is a "test bed" for an exploration and understanding of society and its cultures. In this context, the city of Mumbai is my space for exploring the multilingualism of its French language teachers.

How Do We Understand Multilingualism Today?

In this section, I will briefly discuss my understanding of multilingualism throughout this narrative account, which is central to its interpretation. The above example given by Pandit (preceding section) in the 1970s already points towards a broad understanding of individual multilingualism (the European discourse prefers the distinction multilingualism to mean a societal phenomenon and plurilingualism, referring to an individual's linguistic repertoire). Pandit's trader is a multilingual individual, possessing many languages at his disposal that he comfortably uses as per convenience to communicate (Pandit, 1972).

Conventional understanding today of the term multilingualism has changed in recent years with the upsurge of a large body of research in this field (Makoni & Pennycook, 2012; Wei, 2018 amongst others). Multilingualism can no longer be understood in the restricted sense of two monolingualisms meeting in a commonplace, but language itself is reconceptualised as a "multilingual, multimodal and multisensory meaning-making resource" (Otheguy et al., 2019, p. 27). In the context of language-rich Mumbai as in the larger context of India, it would be diminishing to consider multilingualism in any other form. Languages commonly meet in daily social and professional lives. Hybrid sentences such as the following are very common in Mumbai in daily communication, as well as in public spaces on signs, for example: "*Pets ikde allowed nahi*" (Marathi-English: Pets are not allowed here), "*chatpata taste*" (Hindi-English: referring to a taste that only an Indian would know precisely—tangy and hot at the same time). These examples present language as a complex yet spontaneous network of communicative and affective elements. It is this specific nature of Indian multilingualism that is its natural pluralism and that extends continuously through the country, which researchers called "organic pluralism" (Khubchandani, 1997, p. 98)—a non-competitive, interconnected language space within a society. Mumbai is perhaps one of the best examples of this interconnectedness and language synergy in India. We may recall here the interesting notion of "multilingual franca," proposed by Makoni and Pennycook

(2012), and which is not far removed from Pandit's trader, who today could still be the emblematic resident of Mumbai city. Following this overview of multilingualism, I seek to see how this interplay between languages translates into the foreign language classroom.

Through Their Lens: Teacher Narratives

Having now laid out the background, I move to the core of the narrative account, which is the teacher narratives. In the following subsections, I present a partial reconstruction of the discussions that I had with the teachers. Subsequently, I shall proceed to an analysis and understanding of the narratives. Six French language teachers spoke through their personal experiences, their beliefs and their relationship with the languages they know and they use in their social, personal, and professional lives. The discussions with the teachers were mostly in English to facilitate integration into the narrative accounts. However, at times, some teachers used some French in our discussions.

Growing Up With Languages

In talking with the teachers, my intention was to understand the different languages that they negotiated growing up and in their daily lives. I use pseudonyms for the teachers, to keep close to the genre of the narrative account and to introduce a personal human touch to what the teachers share about themselves and their narratives. The teachers that participated in the study are Heena, Hetal, Natasha, Neeti, Rabia, and Sanjeevani. I will provide a brief background of these teachers that will help the reader relate better to them.

Heena's (57 years old) home language is Hindi, and she has an affinity towards English. She migrated to Mumbai after her marriage. Hetal (46 years old) grew up in Mumbai, and worked in another profession before eventually becoming a French teacher. Her home language is Gujarati. Natasha (56 years old) grew up in the state of Gujarat and, like Heena, moved to Mumbai after her marriage. She eventually became a French teacher in a school. Her home languages are Gujarati and English. Neeti (36 years old), native to Mumbai, speaks Gujarati at home, and teaches French in a school. Rabia (60 years old), also a native of Mumbai, grew up speaking Hindi and English and feels connected to the Urdu language. She teaches university students. Sanjeevani (34 years old) works in a school. She is native to Mumbai and her home language is Marathi.

It is obvious that the teachers grew up naturally negotiating multiple languages in their daily lives. Sanjeevani is very conscious of her Marathi roots and the strong presence of the language at home, safeguarded through intergenerational communication and through literature in print.

> We speak Marathi at home. Hindi of course was always around us and then we watched Hindi movies! And we picked up colloquial Hindi and regularly used it with our friends. All my education was in English. Sometimes we speak in English at home. When we visited my grandparents or my elderly relatives, we only spoke in Marathi and that continues even today. I learnt to read and write Marathi as we learnt it in school and then at home, there were always Marathi books around at home, Marathi newspapers and all that you know. (Sanjeevani).

Natasha and Heena are also eager to point out the different languages present at different points in their lives. Natasha identifies language shifts due to geographical mobility and how she embraced a new language Marathi without any perceived resistance.

> When growing up, we always spoke Gujarati at home. At school we learnt English. And with neighbours we spoke in Gujarati. Later, when I moved to Mumbai, I spoke Hindi, and now a

smattering of Marathi, which I understand well but do not speak as well. Much later in my life I learnt French and I continued with it. Between my husband and I we use Gujarati and English. (Natasha)

We spoke Hindi growing up. And English was always present as it was the medium of learning in school and then the reading culture at home. Hence I read a lot in English. And French came in later in school. I pursued it as it fascinated me. (Heena)

However it was the conscious reliving of their language identity through their narratives that brought this awareness of the importance of languages in their lives to the fore.

The Journey with Learning

Another theme that emerged as I helped teachers relive their language learning experiences, was the place of French in conjunction with other languages in their personal and linguistic space. Hetal, for example, recalled learning French after she had already graduated:

I started learning French rather late in my life. I was working in an office before and then got tired of it and explored French. I continued learning. Once I achieved a good level in the language, I felt eager to start teaching and got an opportunity to teach in a school. Thus I began teaching. I like teaching French. I am happy I can speak Gujarati, English, French, Hindi and Marathi. I find myself connected with languages. Somewhere it's satisfying to deal with languages, and to speak it. My family thinks I am obsessed with French, though! (Hetal)

Speaking multiple languages and using them for different purposes reveals the interconnectedness of these languages within the socio-professional language ecology of these teachers. Hetal uses adjectives such as "connected," "satisfying," and "obsessed" that display her attachment to languages. The choice of language use, though varied, is not random and is often determined by the context and the usefulness of language as we see in the quotes below. Heena, while retracing her language learning journey, expresses positive feelings and takes pride in being a language teacher and the power of expression.

I began learning at school, then in college, and thus began my journey. I speak Hindi at home and a good bit of English. Of course business outside the house is in English or Hindi, and at work I teach in French and English. I feel proud actually that I can be a language teacher, happy to work with languages. I do not know how to express it correctly but it makes you feel nice. (Heena)

Rabia "cherishes" the aesthetic dimension that French has given her through its literature and cultural depth.

I got the opportunity to learn French in school. I loved the language and continued and here I am with thirty six years of teaching experience behind me, at college, at university. I was always fond of literature. I have a Masters in English literature and French literature. Going deeper into the language, I discovered literature in the original, which is not the same thing as reading the translated work. I discovered French songs, French paintings and how the language had spread over so many countries. I cherish my association with English and French, and of course, Hindi and Urdu which are so close to me on a daily basis. Such closeness to language gives me a certain dimension to your personality, to your aesthetics. (Rabia).

Neeti, urged into reflection by her narrative, clearly enjoys her transaction with multiple languages.

Gujarati is my first language. I share a bond with this language. We speak it at home, with my parents. Of course, English is always there, ever-present! I have never really thought about this

in detail, but as you ask me, it is quite interesting, to be dealing with so many languages all in one go! Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, and of course French. My Marathi is not so good, I manage though! I do enjoy it. (Neeti).

However, one element that clearly emerges is that the learning process of languages is marked by the use of English, and of learning language "the correct way," as the observations from Heena and Sanjeevani below show.

When I learnt in the seventies, we did not learn how to speak. It was more of written work, stress on writing, on correct grammar of French, the right spelling, the correct verbs etc. Now there is a need more than ever to communicate. So one needs to modify according to that. (Heena).

We worked so hard on our conjugation of verbs, we had a very sincere approach to learning the language. We did not only crave for the marks. The teacher would explain the grammar well and we worked well on the grammar. That has given me a strong base today. We learnt English, though that was the medium of instruction. In Marathi and Hindi classes also we used English though we wrote in Hindi and Marathi. The teachers were very good in explanations. We did a lot of writing work. The English teacher taught in English, the Marathi and Hindi teachers used some Hindi and Marathi in class but explanations were in English, so that everyone could follow easily. (Sanjeevani).

Both Heena and Sanjeevani touch upon the "correctness" of language learning and the importance of the written competence prevalent in their learning years. Heena's narrative clearly brings out the change that she perceives in society over a period of time and how language learning needs to adapt to a more communicative approach, In contrast, Sanjeevani does not explicitly touch upon this element, although her narrative reveals the compartmentalisation between languages in the learning process.

Teaching French

I now focus on the role of language in the professional space and lives of these teachers. I am interested in knowing how they handle the multiple languages of the classroom, the teaching techniques they employ to tap the multilingual resources of their students, the struggles and challenges they may encounter in this process. I see the same enthusiasm and proximity with languages as a motivating factor for these teachers. Natasha is well aware of the challenges within the classroom that make a communicative approach difficult.

I like teaching, communicating with students. I always wanted to be a teacher, to learn not just to read and write but to speak French as well. Therefore when I began teaching, I wanted to communicate this ability to the students. But you see inside the classroom it becomes difficult. There are 45 students of varying levels. And in 50 minutes, we have to complete the task and leave the room. We cannot achieve everything. (Natasha)

Neeti echoes Natasha's views, but makes her best efforts under such circumstances.

How is it possible to teach spoken French fluently to the students? Many are not interested. Many find it difficult to understand. This is the challenge and I enjoy it. (Neeti)

Rabia's use of English as a medium for teaching French is the same as Neeti's. English, above all, performs the important function of bringing clarity and understanding in the classroom.

I like to teach, I like being a teacher (…). I learnt with detailed explanations of grammar. That's how my grammar base is strong. One cannot explain all this in French to young thirteen and

fourteen year olds. The base has to be reinforced, and they have to perform well in the exams. Therefore, we have to explain the same through English. (Rabia)

All the teachers deal with a class that is linguistically heterogeneous in terms of languages present within, with English being the medium of instruction. The presence of several languages in class often comes through in the teacher narratives as the weakest link in the learning process in the eyes of the teachers—it is a hindrance to the right accent, or the reason for code-switching. While there are multiple languages present in the classroom in the student repertoire, the teachers do not treat them as a resource or an advantage.

For Neeti, the stress is on "mastering" a language correctly and achieving target language proficiency.

I constantly encourage my students to speak in French. They do resort to English in the class all the time or chat in their own languages—some of them. I have told them not to do so many times, but do they listen? Many are not interested in really mastering the language. They want to get good scores. They want to tell everyone, they have learnt the language, but how well they learn it is another thing altogether. Actually they do not always want to master languages. What's the use of improperly learning a language? But nowadays I notice—see, how they speak English? Half the sentence in English and one half in Hindi or using Hindi words in between to connect sentences. Can you believe it? (Neeti)

Rabia is very conscious of straightening out accents that occur because of other languages that the learners have in their repertoires.

When I teach, I do use English as a medium of communication. Sometimes, I recognise the language they speak at home in their French accent or even their English accent. I try to correct it, but somewhere it lingers on. It is difficult to get rid of that. I keep telling them—don't speak in Hindi in class, pay attention to your French pronunciation. (Rabia)

Heena brings out the "messy" part of knowing many languages and mixing them up and is deeply concerned about the lack of desire to learn "perfectly."

Half-baked learning has become the norm. Even their English is full of mistakes. Their Hindi, it's all a mix of many things—including English and what not. Whenever they get a chance, they are chatting with their friends in Hindi, or sometimes Marathi or Gujarati, you know they make friends with others who speak their language. So no one is concerned about learning correctly, learning perfectly. (Heena)

Sanjeevani echoes Heena's views and, although she draws examples from other languages, she does not perceive it as a resource, but rather as the root cause for the imperfections in learning the target language.

It is important for the students to learn to speak in French—at least a little bit. I do try. But I have to resort to English, how will they understand otherwise. Sometimes to correct their pronunciation, I give examples from Hindi or Marathi. For example—parent. They mispronounce it in French. Then I tell them, it's like "paapdi" or "chaat"... But the main problem is there is confusion between the languages they already know and French. So they mix up pronunciations. That's a very big problem. And when they write also, it's the same issue. All the languages get mixed up and it becomes a mess. That's why in class I tell them, concentrate on your French! (Sanjeevani)

Hetal is honest in confessing that she has never reflected on integrating the other languages towards teaching French, although she is well aware of the presence of many languages in class.

Yes I do know most of my students speak at least three or four languages—I have students who speak Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, Gujarati, Tulu etc at home. Of course, all of them speak English, Hindi. Sometimes good Marathi also. Sometimes you hear them chat in Hindi in the class and English is omnipresent. I haven't really tried using their languages to explain or teach French. I find some time to speak in French though this component does not count for much in the exams. (Hetal)

Natasha is the only teacher who refers to a positive multilingual element—her experience with idiomatic expressions in different languages and comparing it with French expressions.

Once we were having a discussion in class on idiomatic expressions. And students came up with interesting expressions in Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati etc—the languages they know or speak at home. It was very nice to compare these expressions, some which are common, others which are not. (Natasha)

Rabia brings in other languages in class but is apologetic about it, and is quick to add that she does not want to "make it a habit." Neeti too has a tone of regret about using another language (English) while teaching French and underlines that it is more out of compulsion (to facilitate understanding) than choice.

Sometimes I write the pronunciation in Hindi on the board, it helps, but I don't do it often. Only sometimes. I don't want to make it a habit. I stick to French and English by and large. But there are also limitations. I do not have much time in class. (Rabia)

You have to explain the grammar and other difficult concepts in English. Only then everyone understands. (Neeti)

Others, like Sanjeevani, who do take the help of local languages while teaching seem to have difficulty accepting that this can be a useful and meaningful strategy for target language proficiency.

Discussion

By virtue of their retrospective character, narratives encourage a reflective thought process. The narrative extracts that we have looked at in the previous section reveal teacher beliefs at a personal, social, and professional level.

At a personal level, the teachers I talked with are conscious of their multilingual identity. They recognise their strong multilingual repertoires, through the pleasant personal experiences that they narrate and an evident proximity with different languages. This allows us to understand how they negotiate between languages and view themselves as users of these languages. They move effortlessly between their many Indian languages and a foreign language that is French. In this process, they construct a "hybrid" identity as a foreign language teacher. By this I refer to a distinct sense of identity of one negotiating between, and inhabiting languages, and also occupying these many spaces simultaneously—one that is local and rooted in home languages and cultures, the other emerging from the foreign language and culture and the resultant third space, to borrow from Bhabha (1994), mediated by the presence and knowledge of the foreign language.

However, I notice that this positive sense of identity does not percolate favourably within the classroom. The narratives regarding classroom practices and events often embody the notion of "monolingual superiority." A language, if we know one, should be well mastered. The presence of other languages in a person's life even with varying levels of mastery, though acknowledged, is neither perceived nor understood as a strength. While the teacher

narratives reveal the variety of languages and acknowledge that variety, the celebration of the multilingualism of learners or even perceiving that as a distinct advantage is absent in how they articulate their views. In fact, some teachers are even critical of improper use of language, imperfections and code switching. Only one teacher, Natasha, makes an allusion to a positive inclusion of languages present in the class. She stands out as an example of someone who has moved beyond the "looking down" upon local languages, and has succeeded in de-normalising the stigmatising hierarchy. Although she did not outline in her comments any particular reason for her significantly different methodology, I sensed that she had a humanistic approach concerning languages, especially while referring to her activity involving other languages as "interesting" and "nice to compare." This reminds me of Agnihotri's (2014) observation that language conceptualised as multilinguality is "constitutive of being human" (p. 364). One has to first begin by accepting the other, and this means accepting their language(s) too. This idea helps conceptualise multilingualism differently. Natasha, in this case, seems to be naturally sensitive toward the languages present around her, that her learners have, and is sensitised to this useful strategy.

It is evident that if teachers are not averse to the languages present in class, they are struggling with the multilingualism that they are confronted with. Here, three aspects come to the fore. Firstly, the learning beliefs of teachers, which are fashioned by their own learning experience, give them a strong sense of mastering a language correctly. In this scheme of things, one is empowered with knowledge only when one achieves perfection in it. The second is the inherent hierarchy of languages that is present in society and education, and to which they are not immune. Therefore, mobilising languages other than English in the French classroom is frowned upon, and thus it is left to the margins or spoken about with hesitation or apology. This is also the reason for the underlying sense of guilt in using languages such as Hindi or Marathi to teach, even though the teachers do find it useful in their pedagogy. The only language that can disrupt this process is English by virtue of its implicit superiority. This discriminating hierarchy has been normalised in the lives of the teachers and naturally trickles into their pedagogical practices. The third aspect is a lack of awareness about multilingualism. The flexibility and movement that exist between languages at a societal level evaporate when it comes to the language classroom that is described here. Even if some teachers are not hostile to languages other than English and French, they are clearly unaware about integrating a multilingual approach in class, and even about understanding multilingualism through a larger prism.

By and large, the narratives reveal that we are dealing with a notion of multilingualism that translates as "two or more monolinguals in one body" (Creese & Blackledge, 2010, p. 105). Teachers are directed towards a bilingual approach (English–French/French–English) largely because of their beliefs being fashioned by their own learning experiences. It is an embodiment of the internalisation of the language hierarchy and the monolingual approach by the teachers. Despite alluding to bilingualism and multilingualism as guidelines, government policies do not distinguish between a fluid multilingualism in class and a rigid framework of educational norms. The National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 in India, at the very onset, declares that one of its key objectives is "promoting multilingualism and the power of language in teaching and learning" (Government of India Ministry of Human Resource Development, p. 5). The policy additionally recognises bilingualism as a focus area for teaching: "Teachers will be encouraged to use a bilingual approach, including bilingual teaching–learning materials, with those students whose home language may be different from the medium of instruction" (p. 13). Moreover, India has long embraced the "three language policy" and the NEP 2020 further clarifies that at least two of these languages will be native to India besides making space for foreign languages in the educational system.

So it is clear that languages enjoy a place of importance in educational policy. However, the challenges start from this point onwards as languages that exist alongside each other, but rarely co-exist, rarely "speak" to each other. This additionally contributes to a general old-world notion of a largely "monolingual multilingualism." Knowing many languages imperfectly is neither a disadvantage nor an inconvenience. In fact it should be viewed as linguistic capital, a strength which is also dynamically shifting—like the imperfect English spoken by the youth of Mumbai, which one of the teachers explicitly mentions critically.

The hegemonic presence of English is also clear. While it is an important language, there is no bridge between English and the other languages in these contexts. This "language isolation" also weakens the multilingualism of both teacher and learner, and does not translate into enriching classroom pedagogy for foreign language learning. The two seem strangely divorced. Use of other languages besides English seems unnecessary, and, even if productive, remains in the margins. Here is where language and curriculum specific policies, such as the National Curriculum Framework (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2005), and the National Focus Group report on the teaching of Indian languages (National Focus Group on Teaching of Indian Languages, 2006), could help. These policies clearly recognise multilingualism as linked to the identity of the learner, and advocate it as a classroom strategy by the language teacher. But this has to percolate to the teachers on the ground, as the multilingual repertoire of both the teacher and the learner are underexplored or practically neglected.

Concluding Remarks

Narratives are a fundamentally "inward" element for those narrating. However, the first-hand accounts help the researcher apprehend the stories (Busch, 2017, p. 52) from an external perspective. Therefore, I have attempted to make meaning of the narratives and the teacher trajectories. Upon reading and re-reading of the narrative transcripts, three lines of thinking were strongly visible: the "one strong language" phenomenon, the sense of guilt in using other languages to teach the target language (in this case French), and lastly, the lack of understanding of the importance of multilingual repertoires in the teaching environment.

Multilingual teachers enjoy a complex and complete toolset at their disposal, which allows them to negotiate different languages for teaching, and, as Busch (2017) puts it, create a "space for potentialities" (p. 57). The conventional pedagogy in use can change only if teachers are made aware of ways of harnessing the languages at their disposal within their teaching framework. There is also a need for informed recognition of the strengths of a multilingual teacher and their multilingual lives that merit attention. Merely having positive beliefs regarding languages does not necessarily lead to adopting a multilingual pedagogy (Haukas, 2016). In this regard, I perceive teacher educational programmes that make them aware of educational policies advocating multilingualism along with a practical class approach to be a solid way of engaging foreign language teachers with multilingualism and incorporating a multilingual pedagogy. Research shows that there is a strong correlation between teacher self-perceived proficiency and their plurilingual awareness (Otwinowska, 2014). To make a teacher engage better with the languages of the class, she needs to be aware of them.

Coming back to my own personal narrative with which I started this narrative account, I had always imagined that I was an incomplete foreign language teacher, rather than a perfect multilingual teacher. It took years of experience, reading, and scholarship to make myself aware of the merits of my multilingual self within the classroom, to fully understand the potential of multilingualism, and to challenge the phenomenon of the two solitudes

(Cummins, 2008)—putting languages into watertight areas that do not interact with each other, which is further reinforced through the evaluation patterns in education. There was always a recognition of the "right grammar phrase," the correct conjugation, the correct spelling and so on. This made the notion of the "right and correct version" the only way of engaging with learning. Moreover, language learning within the institutional framework is highly compartmentalized, offering little or no give-and-take between languages. Therefore, in my opinion, it will take much more than mere teacher education to bring about a change. While teacher training could certainly provide the needed technical solutions for integrating a multilingual approach, the problem is located at a wider sociocultural and sociopolitical level. Therefore, it will also take experience to live and relish one's "languaged self," and the understanding of one's multilingual identity as a reckoning force. A change of consciousness, and questioning the deeply rooted hierarchy of languages, is called for. Of course, ways to enable this force within the teaching-learning framework will have to be created. It will also take the same understanding from concerned stakeholders—institutions, associations, learners and their families, and decision makers. Finally, it would only be an advantage if such diversity could be harnessed for foreign language teaching and learning.

If a language classroom, as Pennycook (2006) explains, is a "transcultural contact zone" (p. 30), then it is incumbent on language teachers to negotiate this richness and reassert the local in the global (Canagarajah, 2005). This in turn could also stimulate a meaningful student-oriented and student-led pedagogy, especially in a linguistically heterogeneous class environment such as in Mumbai. But in order to do so, teachers will have to first unpack their own beliefs concerning multilingualism and confront them.

This study propels me to further expand the boundaries of narratives and encourage teachers to write down their stories with a particular focus on multilingualism. For a future research study, a focus group discussion on multilingualism wherein these narratives could be shared and deliberated upon, could probably be an interesting way of engaging with a pedagogy of multilingualism for foreign language teaching. Eventually, this could be a starting point for reconfiguring classroom pedagogies. There is an urgent need to articulate strategies that allow for L1s to enter L2 spaces. This would help in not just challenging the existing language hegemony, but also making additive bilingualism or multilingualism a viable paradigm in the Indian context. In other words, this could help create a non-guilt multilingual approach in foreign language classrooms where teachers feel empowered to call upon the languages of the learners. In such an approach, the presence of home and first languages would serve as a foothold and not as a hindrance as the narratives in this research reveal. This process could further help to validate learners' linguistic identities and linguistic capital in multilingual settings (Cummins, 2007) such as Mumbai.

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Review Process

This paper was blind peer-reviewed by members of *The Learner Development Journal* Review Network and Journal Steering Group. (*Contributors have the option of open or blind review.*)

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