

Heterogeneity language conceptions' physical education teachers of the fourth (4th) year of primary French schools in Tunisia

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Abstract: This study was within the paradigm of practical epistemology. The purpose of this paper is to study teachers' conceptions about the impact of language interactions during the PE session at the French school in Tunisia and to examine their impact on the learning of students issued from diverse nationalities, and speaking different languages.

Inscribed in the field of Language Didactic and Physical and Sports Activities Didactic, this study is based on assessment of teachers' conceptions of the French school in Tunisia Robert Desnos.

The method used consists on an interrogatory with one of the two actors of the teaching-learning situation: "the teachers" (N= 6). Data were collected through six (6) "a priori" interviews followed by six (6) "semi-directive" interviews. The teaching career of the questioned teachers in French schools is superior or equal to six (6) years, they all have a minimum of experience in French schools abroad such as their seniority in Tunisia is superior or equal to one (1) year, they are all bilingual.

Based on the statements of the interviewed teachers, the analysis of the empirical study results revealed that the efficacy of French monolinguals in the optimization process of learning PE is relative. Monolinguals' is therefore partially effective because it does not affect the whole school audience and that further accentuates the phenomenon of "unequal opportunities" between students who does not master French language sufficiently and others already francophone.

Monolinguals' has several positive effects on PE learning; however, it also shows negative repercussions that can be filled if we use another language that can be preferably the local language of the country in which the school is located.

Keywords: Physical Education – verbal intervention– Monolinguals' - Heterogeneity – Learning/teaching.

I. Introduction:

Throughout the last decades, the management of the heterogeneity has been always been a complex issue in French schools abroad, where students are different by their previous knowledge, their behaviour, their rate of abstraction, their interests, their expression capacities, their pedagogical and especially their ethnic and social origin profile.

Deals with this multidimensional heterogeneity phenomenon, the teachers are expected to provide heterogeneous responses to allow some students to improve themselves without wasting time and to help those in need to fill their gaps.

Considered as a discipline of verbal and nonverbal interactions between the two actors of the teaching-learning situation, the PE has always been one object of a large number of researches undertaken in the field of didactics. In this view, the students heterogeneity will underpin, according to (Tarin, 2006), one or more native languages shimmering a cultural diversity, the juxtaposition of various nationalities within the school community causes regularly some communication problems related to the insufficient mastery of the French language face to a largely monolingual speech.

In this context, the semio-constructivist approach in physical and sports education is a new and innovative approach of research in didactics of physical activities and sport. Recent studies carried out in this framework have focused on the main role of language interaction in the co-construction of knowledge (Gréhaigne & al., 2001; Mahut, 2003; Nachon, 2004; Chang, 2009;). These studies have emphasized the importance of verbalization in the teaching/learning process.

In this same perspective, the approach of Vygotsky and the neo-Vygotskian seems to be the reference theory with excellence in the scholar learning. This latter consists on a conception of thought functioning where the language and the social factors play an important role in the process of knowledge construction (Coll, 2002).

Also, Mahut and Gréhaigne (2000) argue that the learning process can be seen as a situation of total communication in which the learner receives a message and acts in accordance with it. The language is therefore at the heart of learning.

Based on the reasoning of Fillol (2009), the fact that the linguistic learnings are realized during all school activities in their diversity and whatever the disciplinary field in which they are associated, they increase the idea that it is through the language work that the students enroll in the conceptualization activity that allows the acquisition of new knowledges.

Thus, " *it is clear that the language participates in the construction of learning and must be mobilized in the diversity of activities and disciplines of the class*" (Hamby, 2001, p. 42).

The relationship between language and motor skills is therefore more important than we can imagine. A reality that Anett (1994) confirmed by developing the idea of the existence of a bridge action-language explaining how the verbal type information can be stored in memory and activated in the appropriate moment for the production of motor skills . According to the same author, it is a relationship between two well-defined areas of knowledge, which are on the one hand the field of declarative knowledge and the field procedural knowledge on the other hand. The interaction between the verbal sphere and the motor sphere would grow by the construction of cognitive representation.

To synthetise, Berard (2009) postulates that the task to achieve is justified because it is creative of interaction and that, as in a natural acquisition of a language, it is through the interaction that the learning is realized . We can admit that the set-point is a fundamental determinant in the process of incorporating the teaching content and the execution of the motor task in PE.

Thus, "*In PE the linguistics know-how are often needed in the construction of motor know-how and both of them are built in action*" (Hapel, 2010, p. 2).

In this research, we underway from a concretely observed fact in the French schools abroad and from a central question posed by this manifestation. We took the example of one of these schools established in Tunisia. By the observable fact we indicate the progressive emergence of the concept of heterogeneity in the teachers' current language which returns mainly to the different mutations of the French educational system.

One therefore wonders about the impact of the monolingual speech characterize the teacher-student interactions on the teaching content at the French primary schools in the Tunisia, and on the ability of the student to assimilate this content.

Thus, does the French monolinguals' allow a better access to knowledge with heterogeneous classes? Otherwise, does a teaching approach based on the French language, with students issued from different nationalities, promote effectively the act of learning on PE or it inhibits it?

II. Method

In this study we are dealing with a purely descriptive approach which seeks to study the verbal exchange of the teaching-learning situations actors at the French schools abroad in Tunisia. The research protocol proposed in this study consists on a census of the teachers' conceptions about the language interactions during the PE session. It aims also to examine the impact of these interactions on the learning process in the discipline mentioned above with pupils notable by the diversity of their nationalities and therefore their native languages.

Indeed, after a formal consent from the directors of one of the French schools implanted in Tunisia, we proceed through six (6) "a priori" interviews followed by six (6) "semi-directive" interviews with six (6) teachers of the fourth (4th) year of primary school "C-M 1" from Robert Desnos French School.

More explicitly, the data collection was conducted in two phases:

- ❖ The first consists on an "a priori" interview with the fourth (4th) year of primary teachers at the French school Robert Desnos in Tunisia. It seek to collect data that can be useful in our study such as the languages that these teachers master, their teaching careers in French schools, their seniority in Tunisia...

The importance of this information was in the fact that they may explain or clarify some opinions or positions. During these interviews we presented the study and its various stages to the concerned teachers.

We conduct these interviews with all the teachers of the fourth (4th) year of primary, separately, in the middle of the school year and after taking appointments based on their availability. These interviews are short and last between twenty (20) to thirty (30) minutes each.

We note that this type of survey is similar to the questionnaire method, but it is different in the measure that the respondent may answer as he wishes.

- ❖ The second phase consists on a "semi-directive" interview with the same teachers previously interviewed relevant to their conceptions about the monolingual nature of debate teacher-pupil, its impact on PE learning and the possible solutions according to their experiences in the French schools generally and in those located in Tunisia particularly.
- These interviews were conducted during the third quarter, after taking appointment based on their disponibility.
- The interviews duration was scheduled for fourty (40) minutes; it varied slightly from one subject to another.
- These interviews are recorded by a Dictaphone and then they will be transcribed then translated to English to be clearly analyzed.
- The grid interview was constructed based on the teachers' speech analysis. Structured into six broad categories, this grid has allowed the categorization of the surveyed teachers' responses. Each of these categories is composed of sub-categories or items.

III. Results:

The Table below shows the results collected from the "semi-directive" interviews conducted with the teachers of the fourth (4th) year of primary school at the French school Robert Desnos in Tunisia.

Table 1:

Results of the semi-directive interviews conducted with the teachers

Category	Item	Verbal intervention in French	Verbal intervention in other language	Non verbal intervention
1. PE teaching language	The language used for teaching PE	41 73.214% (ii)	15 26.786% (ii)	0 0% (ii)
<u>TOTAL : 56</u> <u>13.625 % (i)</u>				
2. Monolingualism efficacy	Optimizing the PE and the language learning	24 48% (iii)	13 26 % (iii)	0 0% (iii)
<u>TOTAL : 50</u> <u>12.165 % (i)</u>	Obstruction of the PE teaching content	11 22 % (iii)	2 4 % (iii)	0 0% (iii)
3. Methods of evalutation of the assimilation degree	Setpoint Reformulation	15 32.608 % (iv)	1 2.173 % (iv)	0 0% (iv)
<u>TOTAL : 46</u> <u>11.192 % (i)</u>	Conformity of the gesture execution to the setpoint (physical reaction)	0 0% (iv)	0 0% (iv)	30 65.217 % (iv)
4. Linguistic difficulties	PE terminology	12 29.268 % (v)	0 0% (v)	0 0% (v)
<u>TOTAL : 41</u> <u>9.975 % (i)</u>	Problems posed by the language	27 65.853 % (v)	2 4.878 % (v)	0 0% (v)
5. Heterogeneity management	Explanation through a student (from student to student)	9 5.521 % (vi)	24 14.723 % (vi)	0 0% (vi)
	Teacher-Student intecoomunication	2 1.226 % (vi)	0 0% (vi)	0 0% (vi)
	Translation of the setpoint through anintermediate	0 0% (vi)	12 7.361 % (vi)	0 0% (vi)
<u>TOTAL : 163</u>				

<u>39.659 % (i)</u>	Reformulation, simplification, re-explanation and re-adaptation of the setpoint language	59	0	0
	Metaphor	2	0	0
	Demonstration and shematisation	0 0% (vi)	0 0% (vi)	35 21.472% (vi)
	differentiated teaching (adaptation of the proposed situations to the groups levels)	0 0% (vi)	0 0% (vi)	20 12.269 % (vi)
6. The bilinguism	A solution to the problems posed by the monolingualism in French schools abroad		55 100 % (vii)	
TOTAL : 55 <u>13.382 % (i)</u>			411	
Total				

- (i) These percentages are calculated with regard to the entire corpus.
- (ii) These percentages are calculated with regard to the category "PE teaching language".
- (iii) These percentages are calculated with regard to the "Monolingualism efficacy".
- (iv) These percentages are calculated with regard to the "Methods of evaluation of the assimilation degree".
- (v) These percentages are calculated with regard to the category "Linguistic difficulties".
- (vi) These percentages are calculated with regard to the category "Heterogeneity management".
- (vii) These percentages are calculated with regard to the category "The bilinguism".

IV. Discussion

This research study the linguistic practices during a PE session at the French schools in Tunisia, determine the PE teaching language and evaluate its effectiveness on the learning process. Furthermore, it aims to identify the processes that teachers use to evaluate the degree of their students assimilation, to notice the learners linguistic difficulties, to list the different practices used to manage the students heterogeneity. Finally, it proposes the bilingualism as a solution to escape the linguistic problems mentioned above.

The analysis of the results reveal a rapprochement between the interests brought to the PE teaching language, its efficacy, as well as the methods used to evaluate the student assimilation degree.

More explicitly, the language of instruction of the PE which occupies (13.62%) of the entire corpus, is marked by the supremacy of "verbal interventions in French" (73.21%) compared to the "verbal intervention with another language" (26.78%).

More clearly, the PE teaching at the French schools in Tunisia is mostly monolingual in French. This monolingual character based on a policy of assimilation is, according to Al-Baidhawe (2007), one of the particularities of the educative system in France since Jules Ferry imposed a single national language at the expense of the regional and the migrants' languages. This particularity may be due to a political choice as reported, according to him, Jean-Pierre Chevènement who affirmed that the immersion education in a foreign language reduce the French language to nothing more than a foreign language. The author speaks about "Jacobinism", that is to say the idea that there should be a national unity, which led France to reject the local dialects and the other languages for the benefit of a single language, namely: The French.

In a previous study, Ana Vivet (2000) speaks about this situation of monolinguals' and demonstrates that in French schools abroad, the language of communication and teaching is the French and that the native language of non-Francophone students is allowed only at the beginning of learning, but it must disappear later. Indeed, the fundamental teachings are performed only in French to push children to think in French. She attributes to this perspective a principle of educational nature since the young child acquires more facility for the Early Language Learning. This French linguistic policy contributes on promoting the dissemination abroad of its unilingual traditional school model. Like said teacher1 (**T 1**): "*It is true that we were the euuuh... our official instructions recommend that we must teach in French, it's clear.*" However, the choice of a monolingual communication mode is not only political as postulates **T 3**: "*it is the school policy, the school choice... yes!!*" since the use of French language in French schools abroad is somehow obligatory such as the majority of students do not master sufficiently other languages according to the same teacher **T3**: "*I do not have the choice! I have only the French ... and here they not master English for example*". In addition, most of the teachers do not master the Arabic language **T 1**: "*I am really bad in languages ... I admit it is wrong to be here without mastering Arabic*", **T 5**: "*I do everything in French and hhhh this is all what I can for them*" and this is

basically due to the fact that the habilitation in Arabic language, which is the local language in Tunisia, is not required for the recruitment of these teachers.

Furthermore, teachers verbal interventions presented in other languages occupy a sizable portion; they exceed ¼ of the total of the employed teaching languages. It is therefore an alternate use of two or more languages in a sentence, a speech or a conversation that Anciaux (2008) calls "code-switching."

Similarly, Teachers' conceptions show the efficacy of the French language in the PE learning process **T 6:** "*In the third (3rd) cycle: fourth (4th) and fifth (5th) year of primary... I think that it's really effective and beneficial for the students... I even think that it facilitate our work*". However, this efficiency is relative either because the use of the French language is an obligation **T 6:** "*I would say that it is effective because today we're competent like that, if they ask me tomorrow to teach in Arabic I would not be able to do it, so today I am effective with the language I master*" either because it is less effective than bilingual teaching as expressed **T 1:** "*I found that in Tunisia it is perhaps the most effective, downright yes, the bilingualism*".

Teachers also agree that during a PE session, the use of a monolingual speech also optimizes the mastery of the French language **T 2:** "*No it is effective, definitely, because it is true that when you put the children in a linguistic bath where there is only the French language, they will eventually master it*". Moreover, the PE could be in the service of the language and improve its learning **T 1:** "*The gesture feeling will necessarily help the child to remember the word or term and then it will be part of his baggage ... it improves the French yes!*"

In this context, Audigier and al (2007) certify the correlation between "the French language learning" and "the motor learning", he postulates that the PE teacher teaches the French language drawing on physical practices which can serve for the non-francophone students. For these, the challenge is to acquire "in and by" PE correct syntactical structures using a common vocabulary with the other disciplines, specific to the PE discipline and to each Physical and Sportive Activity.

The presence of another language in parallel with the French, can also promote the PE teaching in the French schools abroad and make it easier as says **T 5:** "*Personally if I was an Arabic-speaking it would have been easier*".

The French language may also have an obstruction effect on the PE teaching content in the case of a heterogeneous classes as evidenced the results presented above ; **T 4** states : "*If the goal was the French language teaching, of course that it is favoring, but if the goal is the PE teaching it can disfavor.*" Thus, monolinguals are not fully effective **T 4:** "*For some students monolinguals' is rather inhibitor.*"

The obstruction generated by the other languages, especially the local language (Arabic in this case), is negligible since it is the first language that the student masters even before entering to school.

Generally, the monolinguals' has several positive effects on the PE learning, however, it also shows negative repercussions that can be faced if we use another language which can be preferably the local language of the country in where the school is located. We assist therefore on a "code-switching" phenomenon in which there are constructive complementarities between the French language and the local language. Anciaux (2008) talks about this complementarities and attests that the code-switching appears as an effective means of communication during the PE sessions in the Caribbean.

For this reason, Alain (2000) insists on the fact of teaching the teachers how to use two languages that form the learning and the cultural education of their students lives.

The data collected show that the "methods of evaluation of the degree of assimilation" which represents (11.19%) of the entire corpus, are namely two: first, the "Setpoint Reformulation" (37.78%) which occurs rather in French (32.60%) than any other language (2.17%), and second, the "Conformity of the gesture execution to the setpoint (physical reaction)" which falls under the "non-verbal interventions" (65. 21%).

During the PE session, sometimes students find themselves totally unprepared for a set point, they are in a deadlock situation and therefore cannot engage themselves in the task either because they did not understand the instructions or because they have a motor problem.

To identify the cause, teachers refer, first, to the student physical reaction and the compliance of the gesture execution to the set point, **T 6** certify, "*Well I see it... euuuuh I see that during the execution*". That is what **T 2** confirms: "*Well he will do what I have already demanded...and if he will apply correctly it means that he understood the instructions ... it is based on his performance*".

And second, they refer to the set point reformulating to verify if the student has understood and by the way to reduce the errors assimilation. We can detect the use of the reformulation as an evaluation process in the assertions of **T 4:** "*In my case, I often ask the students who are still struggling to understand to rephrase the set point*" and **T3:** "*I ask them to rephrase*".

As for the "linguistic difficulties", they occupy only (9.97%) of the entire corpus and are divided between "problems posed by the language" (70.73%), those above consist on problems of communication and understanding of the French language (65.85%), while the problems of expression and assimilation with another language does not exceed (4.87%) of all these difficulties .

And also problems relating to "PE specific terminology" pronounced in French (29.26%).

The results of this study reveal also the linguistic problems that teachers remarked throughout their experience while teaching PE at the French School Robert Desnos in Tunisia. These problems are essentially related to the French language **T 6**: "*I know there are problems with the language, I already had children who did not understand French at all*" or to the non proximity of the native language to the scholar language **T 3**: "*Sometimes the native language of the child poses problems too*".

In addition to the listed difficulties, there others relating to the PE specific terminology as state **T 5**: "*when we did the Rugby cycle it was clear that there's a lot of children who did not know the Rugby specific vocabulary and that can create understanding problems*", **T 4**: "*Well it's already the sport jargon, the specific PE vocabulary*", **T 1**: "*it is especially the vocabulary... yes it is more the technical terms*" and **T 3**: "*The sports specific vocabulary... the purely sporting terminology*".

Besides, the results indicate the predominance of the "Heterogeneity management" category (39.65%) compared to the rest of the categories. This latter favors the processes of "reformulation, simplification, re-explanation and set-point adaptations" presented in the French language (36.19%). Also, the management of heterogeneity is mainly based on "the demonstration and the schematization" (21. 47%) and also "explanation through a student" (20.24%) at the expense of the "teacher-student intercommunication" (1. 22 %) and "metaphors" also not exceeding (1.22%).

Likewise, the interviewed teachers seem, relatively, support the intermediation of a bilingual speaker to translate the instructions from the French language to another language varying from one student to another (7.36%). Similarly, these teachers use "the differentiated teaching" (12.26%) by adjusting their proposed situations to the groups levels that they have formed based on their students heterogeneity criteria.

In this viewpoint, we mention the importance of the linguistic teaching techniques illustrated by the high percentage of the processes of reformulation, simplification, re-explanation and set-points adaptation, which are all part of the pedagogical verbal interactions (Altet, 1994) since they are an integral part of the teacher's pedagogical intervention.

Thus, to make sure that the information is well transmitted to all students, the teachers opt, in a first step, to communicate the set point already presented previously in a different way maintaining a French monolingual approach **T 3**: "*Generally we reformulate otherwise, we adapt our verbal interventions, we simplify our vocabulary so that the information becomes understood by everyone*" **T 4**: "*In a such context the simplification, adaptation, re-explanation seem necessary*" **T 5**: "*I rephrase, I talk differently, I simplify the set-point*".

The teachers statements attest the primordial role of the tutoring process **T 2**: "*when the student do not understand the instructions he keep hesitating and after a while his partner say eeeeeey it's like that, in Arabic... they do it sometimes and it pass easily... the child understand*" and **T 3**: "*sometimes I'm not obliged to intervene... it is often another student who explain the rules or instructions, it often happens ... For me, I see that the most effective way is the intercommunication between the children especially that I do not master Arabic*".

In general, this method is recognized by its efficiency since a student tutor, spontaneous or formed, allows the motor abilities acquisitions as deducted Lafont (2005).

The use of the set points translation process as stated **T 1**: "*I ask a student who understands what I am saying to translate*" also explains the inefficacy of the French monolingual's with students having problems of assimilation and understanding of the French language. The translation appears therefore as a solution for a successful learning in PE according to **T 4**: "*What I've noticed is that the set point passes faster with the translation*".

In this study, we expanded our investigation beyond verbal communication and we focused on other modes of intervention used by teachers to manage their students' linguistic heterogeneity in the PE session, as long as the receiver is more responsive to non-verbal aspects of the message and that the non-verbal communication is considered as a wealth in some sequences where the oral message is incomprehensible (Mahut and Gréhaigne, 2000).

Thus, the communication process is not limited to verbal exchanges, the gestures and actions which constitute also an important part of what can be shared, especially for younger students as recommended Bisault (2005).

Similarly, the differentiated pedagogy represents one of the most remarkable intervention techniques. Perrenoud (2005) define it as a principle of "positive discrimination" that legitimizes the unequal investment of institution and teachers dedicated to "favor the disadvantaged" in order to neutralize the mechanisms and the inequalities leading to failure.

The surveyed teachers' conceptions also attest their agreement concerning the need to adopt an PE bilingual teaching approach to resolve the monolingual education ambiguities. This agreement appears therefore harmonious with the postulate of Doumbia (2005) who affirms that the native language teaching enables students to better understand and to develop academic skills that will enable them to learn better the foreign language.

These teachers approve therefore an bilingual teaching approach, especially in PE as state **T 1:** "personally I guess that in Tunisia it is perhaps the most effective... downright.. yes... the bilingualism", **T 5:** "I think it would be more efficient to have two languages in sport" and **T 6:** "In cycle III... At the fourth and the fifth years of primary school... I think it is really effective and beneficial for students... I think that the bilingualism would even be the insurer of a good PE learning quality". Moreover, they support the idea of a possible collaboration with an bilingual teacher in the PE teaching which ensures a disciplinary education provided by specialists; **T 2:** "Oh that's good, it's interesting to work with bilingual specialist, because personally I am not able to do it... it is even enriching to teach them some sports concepts in their native languages and in French also, especially that in our school children are truly bilingual... so if the teacher is truly bilingual in sports ah, not in other disciplines, it would be great !", **T 3:** "Yes always... yes I agree... it will be positive because it would be purely disciplinary... but it will be more enriching if this teacher is Arab and we requires an habilitation in French language" and **T 4:** "Especially in PE, I think that the teacher can optimize the teaching of this discipline in French schools".

We note that this solution will also help to keep the educational standards of the French school system (PE teaching ensured by French teachers).

To sum up, the analysis of the empirical study results revealed that the efficacy of French monolinguals' in the optimization of the PE learning process of is relative. These monolinguals' is therefore partially effective because it does not affect the whole school audience and that further accentuates the phenomenon of "unequal opportunities" between students who does not master French language sufficiently and others already francophone.

V. Conclusion

The linguistic interactions of the PE didactic situation at the French school in Tunisia are mainly monolingual despite the ethnic diversity and the linguistic heterogeneity of the student audience. This francophone speech appears partially effective such as it does not allow the set points transmission to all students either because they are not francophone and they do not practice the French language in their familial environments, either because they have not joined the French school since the nursery school which plays, in the context of French schools abroad, the role of a mediator between learning in the home environment and learning in the school environment.

The improvement of the PE teaching process at the French Schools abroad requires, based on this study results, other methods instead of technical adjustments (demonstration, schematisation, differentiated pedagogy... etc). It requires a linguistic adjustment while programming the teaching contents specific to the students' heterogeneous audience marked in the Tunisian context by its Arabic predominance. This adjustment is indispensable as long as "*the Official programs are established for all primary schools in France. They are intended for all, but in reality, they do not seem appropriate to any of them in particular. Want to apply them uniformly everywhere is an unrealizable*" (Charrier, 1918).

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Heterogeneity language conceptions' physical education teachers of the fourth (4th) year of primary

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