CHAPTER **13**

The Subject of English in LK20: A Catalyst for Multilingual and Intercultural Competence?

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Abstract: This chapter focuses on aspects of multilingualism and intercultural competence in the subject of English in the LK20 curriculum. Both terms are first thoroughly defined and discussed; the text then presents a content analysis of the new national curriculum (LK20) with a specific focus on the Core Curriculum and *Curriculum in English*. The authors find that both concepts, multilingualism and intercultural competence, are well incorporated in the LK20 English curriculum, appearing both separately and in tandem. The subject of English is presented as an important building block in pupils' dynamic and developing linguistic and (inter) cultural repertoire. As the first additional language taught in school, English has the potential to be a catalyst for both multilingual and intercultural competence (MIC). However, becoming this catalyst in practice may depend on teachers' and school administrators' interpretations, competences, and attitudes.

Introduction

This chapter explores aspects of multilingualism and intercultural competence in the subject of English in the LK20 curriculum. The aim of the study is to investigate in what ways these two important educational concepts are represented, separately and in combination, and which potential the subject has for nurturing students' multilingual and intercultural repertoire.

For the past three decades, the Council of Europe (2001, 2018) has influenced curriculum development in Europe. The Council of Europe claims that "[a]ctions seek not only to promote language learning but also to secure and strengthen language rights, deepen mutual understanding, consolidate democratic citizenship and contribute to social cohesion" (Council of Europe, n.d.). Since the publication of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (hereafter CEFR), an important aim has been to promote social inclusion through plurilingual and intercultural education (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 157). According to this approach, as a person's experience of language in cultural contexts develops and expands, from home language(s) to the language(s) of society and languages of other peoples (whether learned at school or through direct experience), "he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact" (CEFR Section 1.3).

Similarly, in Norway, national curricula have been influenced by the Council of Europe's aims with respect to language education policy. Since the reform of upper-secondary education in Norway in 1994 (R94), and subsequently in the all-encompassing school reform of 2006 called *Kunnskapsløftet* (LK06) and its renewal in 2020 called *Fagfornyelsen* (LK20), national curricula were significantly inspired by Council of Europe policy and activities.

Multilingual and intercultural competence are both stressed as important educational goals in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, 2018); therefore, they are also stressed in curriculum reform in Norway (LK06; LK20). Interestingly, the Council of Europe views these two concepts as one when it claims that they constitute "the ability to use a plural repertoire of **linguistic and cultural resources** to meet communication needs or interact with other people, and enrich that repertoire while doing so" (Council of Europe, n.d., p. 10, emphasis added). The Council of Europe uses the terms *plurilingualism* and *multilingualism* for different perspectives (a topic to which we will return in the Theory section).

Internationally, the two concepts of multilingualism and intercultural competence have been among the "hot" topics of the past decade. This may

be due to several causes, which include globalization, increased mobility, international conflicts, migration, and political crises. These changes have made societies more multilingual, and the need for knowledge about social inclusion and intercultural communication has become more prominent (Kramsch, 2019; Weber & Horner, 2012). However, even though "the multilingual turn" (May, 2014) is promoted in research and language policy, some researchers claim that there remains a monolingual bias in practice (Kachru, 1994; Kirsch et al., 2020). This illustrates a discrepancy between the research and policy field on the one side and the practice field on the other, regarding both intercultural competence and multilingual competence (Cummins & Persad, 2014; Lundberg, 2019; Myklevold & Speitz, 2021; Simensen, 2003). Furthermore, aspects of multilingualism may be subject to political and social dilemmas (Berthélé, 2021; Kelly, 2015). One of the dilemmas in the practice field is that students are sometimes reluctant to use their full multilingual competence in class (Čeginskas, 2010; Liu & Evans, 2015; Myklevold & Speitz, 2021); another is that teachers report that they are insecure as to what multilingualism is, as they have not received any training in this area (Myklevold & Speitz, 2021). Having this as a background, the present chapter will analyze the policy level, i.e. the English language curriculum (LK20) and explore the following question: In which ways have the concepts of multilingual and intercultural competence been incorporated in English as a subject in Norway's latest educational reform (LK20)?

In order to be able to investigate the two terms *multilingualism* and *intercultural competence* in this text, these concepts need to be defined; moreover, it is necessary to discuss the role they play in contemporary theory about language learning.

Theory

We begin by looking at the term *multilingualism* itself. Multilingualism is a complex phenomenon, one that is multifaceted and therefore hard to define. The Council of Europe uses the term *multilingualism* when it involves a societal dimension, as in "the coexistence of different languages in a given society" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 4), and *plurilingualism* when talking about an individual's language repertoire (Council of Europe, 2001).

Several definitions tend to "count" the number of languages any individual possesses either actively or passively, as seen in Li's definition that, "Anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading)" (Li 2008, p. 4). Yet other definitions of multilingualism involve issues such as (multilingual) identity (Aronin & Laoire, 2004; Rutgers et al. 2021), as when it is argued that language "represents and mediates the crucial element of identity" (Aronin & Laoire, 2004, p. 1). Norton (2013) connects language learning and identity to the language learning context, including power relations in the social world (e.g., status of languages) and social interaction.

Other scholars distinguish between linguistic identity and multilingual identity; they define these two as "associated but different; linguistic identity refers to the way one identifies (or is identified by others) in each of the languages in one's linguistic repertoire, whereas a multilingual identity is an 'umbrella' identity, where one explicitly identifies as multilingual precisely because of an awareness of the linguistic repertoire one has" (Fisher et al., 2018, p. 2). Tiurikova et al. (2021) also discuss language and identity when they relate open-mindedness to L3-learning at school and multilingual identity (p. 1).

Some researchers also link multilingualism to *metacognition* since it involves cognitive processes associated with comparing, assessing, and juxtaposing several languages in one's multilingual repertoire (Haukås, 2018; Jessner, 2018; Myklevold, 2022). While metacognition may be defined in different ways, it frequently involves a consciousness dimension and an "awareness of and reflections about one's knowledge, experiences, emotions and learning" (Haukås et al., 2018, p. 1). In other words, multiple language learning often involves a comparative and metalinguistic perspective. A multilingual teaching pedagogy, for example, including the identification of cognates across previously learnt languages, might be linked to making students more metalinguistically aware of the broad vocabulary they already have in their multilingual repertoires (Myklevold, 2022).

In this text we define multilingualism in a holistic and broad sense, incorporating both its individual and social dimensions as well as aspects of identity and metacognition. We also include dialects and varieties of

languages that the individuals may have in their repertoires. Since pupils in Norway are exposed to many different dialects and Nordic languages, such as Swedish and Danish, and learn English from Year 1, we view *all* students, including those in mainstream classrooms, as multilingual (Haukås & Speitz, 2020, Myklevold & Speitz, 2021).

Next, we move on to the other main concept in our analysis, namely intercultural competence. Our understanding of the term *intercultural competence* follows the definition by Dypedahl (2019). It is: "the ability to relate constructively to people who have mindsets and/or communication styles that are different from one's own" (p. 102). The reason for the choice of the verb "to relate" in this definition is twofold: 1) intercultural competence in interaction with people, and in 2) interpretation of actions and words through texts (Dypedahl & Bøhn, 2020, p. 81).

Øyvind Dahl poses an important question, asking, "Is culture something we have or something we do?" (Dahl, 2014, n.p.), arguing for a middle position between a descriptive essentialist approach, where culture is something static, and a dynamic constructivist approach, where culture is fluid. All language users may in this view be affiliated with various groups or cultures, depending on contexts. According to Dypedahl and Lund (2020), intercultural communication "is understood as any dialogue in which tension may occur as a result of different lenses" (p. 19). It can, consequently, also be linked to the concept of democratic citizenship.

Michael Byram's (1997) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in language learning has undoubtedly had a strong influence on the activities of the Council of Europe. It includes five elements ("*savoirs*"); attitudes (*savoir être*), knowledge (*savoirs*), skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*). Although Byram's model has been much discussed and criticized, among other things for being too harmony-centered, which may cause learning processes that are shallow (Hoff, 2019), it is still used and referred to frequently. Lund (2008) claims that most theorists "agree with Byram that the concept has to do with attitudes, skills and knowledge" (p. 3), and Dypedahl and Lund (2020) confirm a considerable consensus among scholars with regard to central elements of intercultural competence (p. 20).

At the same time as both intercultural competence and multilingualism have received increasing attention in research and curricula, some scholars are now asking for critical approaches to these phenomena. For example, in the field of multilingualism, it is argued that too much research has only focused on the benefits of multilingualism (Berthelé, 2021; Kelly, 2015; McNamara, 2011; Myklevold & Speitz, 2021), and that there has been a selective and celebratory discourse that should be addressed in the field (Berthelé, 2021). Further, even though multilingualism has cognitive and social benefits, it is claimed that "multilingual education is a truly challenging enterprise" (Aronin, 2019, p. 1). With this in mind, the present text involves a critical investigation of representations of multilingual and intercultural competence in the English subject curriculum.

Method

Data were collected through a content analysis of the new national curriculum (LK20), placing a specific focus on the Core Curriculum and the English subject curriculum. As Bowen argues, documents are "stable, 'non-reactive' data sources, meaning that they can be read and reviewed multiple times and remain unchanged by the researcher's influence or research process" (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). Content analysis was chosen in order to analyze how multilingual and intercultural competence is depicted, defined, and operationalized in the subject curriculum of English. We have mainly focused on English as a compulsory subject for all students in Norway from Year 1 to Vg1 (Year 11), since we concentrate on the multilingual repertoires of all students present in mainstream classrooms.

The present content analysis includes a) a scrutiny of aspects of multilingualism and intercultural competence in the overarching Core Curriculum, and b) an analysis of representations of multilingualism, multilingual competence, and intercultural competence in the national subject curriculum in English. According to Cavanagh, central to content analysis is "the distillation, through analysis, of words into fewer content-related categories" (Cavanagh, 1997, p. 5). The presence of certain words, expressions, and themes was analyzed, e.g., "comparing

languages" or "intercultural understanding". The findings were then assigned to separate and intersectional concepts (see Figure 1, Model of multilingual and intercultural competence (MIC)).

Findings and discussion

As previously mentioned, the research question explored was: "In which ways have the concepts of multilingual and intercultural competence been incorporated in English as a subject in Norway's latest educational reform (LK20)?". Therefore, in the following we are first going to look into aspects of multilingualism, then aspects of intercultural competence, and, finally, examples where both concepts appear "in tandem", i.e., where they are presented in the same utterances and contexts.

The overarching Core Curriculum in LK20 stipulates that, "All pupils shall experience that being proficient in a number of languages is a resource […]" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017). In addition, in the new *Curriculum in English*, a significant and recurring competence aim is the following: "The pupil is expected to be able to use knowledge of similarities between English and other languages with which the pupil is familiar in language learning" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019). This important competence aim, which is included, in variations, from Year 2 to Vg1 (Year 11), alludes to the fact that there are many languages present in contemporary EFL classrooms in Norway, and that all of them are intended to be recognized as a part of pupils' linguistic repertoire.

Moving on to the three core elements of the *Curriculum in English* – "Communication", "Language learning", and "Working with texts in English" – we can observe a strong focus on language aspects in the first two elements: "The pupils shall experience, use and explore the language from the very start" (core element "Communication"), or "Language learning refers to developing language awareness and knowledge of English as a system, and the ability to use language learning strategies" (core element "Language learning"). A multilingual aspect is also included in the description of language learning: "Language learning refers to identifying connections between English and other

languages the pupils know and to understanding how English is structured". In this description there seems to be an underlying assumption about metacognition in language learning, suggesting that comparing languages may increase students' language awareness (Haukås et al., 2018; Jessner, 2018).

As already mentioned above, an element of comparing languages is consistently represented in the competence aims for English: Already after Year 2, the curriculum states: "The pupil is expected to be able to find words that are common to English and other languages with which the pupil is familiar". This aim is repeated on all levels (after Year 4, and after Year 7), with variations and increasing complexity. After Year 10, the respective competence aim states that "the pupil is expected to be able to explore and describe some linguistic similarities and differences between English and other languages the pupil is familiar with and use this in one's own language learning". This aspect is interesting with respect to multilingualism. It means that the pupils' first languages, either Norwegian or other home or everyday languages, are (officially) recognized and included in both their linguistic repertoire and language learning in school. This is very much in line with the Council of Europe's language policy recommendations (Council of Europe, 2001, 2018) presented earlier in this chapter. It also means that *all* pupils are considered to be either multilingual or developing a multilingual repertoire (Haukås, in press; Haukås & Speitz, 2020).

Moving on to aspects of intercultural competence, the Core Curriculum in LK20 states that pupils shall "develop their language identity […]" and that language provides them with "a sense of belonging and cultural awareness" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017). The first sentences of the *Curriculum in English*, "Relevance and central values", pick up on the same aspects:

> English is an important subject when it comes to cultural understanding, communication, all-round education and identity development. […] English shall help the pupils to develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns. (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019)

Both *cultural understanding* and *intercultural understanding* are used as terms in this paragraph. The text continues to name similar aspects, including individual and societal values:

> The subject shall develop the pupils' understanding that their views of the world are culture dependent. This can open for new ways to interpret the world, promote curiosity and engagement and help to prevent prejudice. (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019)

These paragraphs from the introductory text to the English subject contain all five elements of Byram's intercultural communicative competence: attitudes (*savoir être*), knowledge (*savoirs*), skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) (Byram, 1997).

Next, unlike "comparing languages" (see above), intercultural aspects are not treated as consistently in the subject's competence aims. On the contrary their appearance is more sporadic, e.g. after Year 4, pupils are expected to "talk about some aspects of different ways of living, traditions and customs in the English-speaking world and in Norway". This representation of intercultural competence seems rather conservative in that it adheres almost exclusively to what Dahl labels "a descriptive essentialist approach" (Dahl, 2014, n.p.). Previously (for instance in LK06), the main geographical and cultural focus used to be on Great Britain, the USA, and other "English-speaking countries". Now, using the phrase "the English-speaking world" seems to be an attempt to widen a traditional and historical perspective. However, contrasting the English-speaking world and Norway seems odd because it does not take into consideration the view that Norway could easily be included in the English-speaking world.

Having looked at elements connected to *multilingualism* and aspects of *intercultural competence*, we will now move on to analyzing parts of the curriculum where the two terms are presented in the same utterances and contexts.

Both *multilingual* and *intercultural competence* are already highlighted in the introductory paragraph of the *Curriculum in English*, "Relevance and central values". They include individual and societal aspects, identity

development, and pupils' self-reflexiveness of their own worldviews. In addition, when the ability to speak several languages is described as an asset in education and society, the two terms appear together. In the latter perspective, multilingualism as an asset in society, the curriculum states its objective quite strongly by declaring that, "the students *shall* experience that the ability to speak several languages is an asset at school and in society in general" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019, emphasis added).

Whereas the first two core elements in English seem to focus mainly on linguistic aspects, the third one, "Working with texts in English", treats multilingualism and intercultural competence in combination:

> By reflecting on, interpreting and critically assessing different types of texts in English, the pupils shall acquire language and knowledge of culture and society. Thus the pupils will develop intercultural competence enabling them to deal with different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns. They shall build the foundation for seeing their own identity and others' identities in a multilingual and multicultural context. (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019)

In this paragraph both aspects appear "in tandem" several times; interestingly, they also appear in connection with pupils' identity development. This part reflects section 1.2 on "Identity and cultural diversity" in the Core Curriculum (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017), which states, "The teaching and training shall ensure that the pupils are confident in their language proficiency, that they develop their language identity […]". The curriculum hereby acknowledges, and even underscores, the view that all language learning happens in a heterogeneous, multilingual, and multicultural context, and that language learning, context and identity development are connected (Norton, 2013).

Interdisciplinary topics, two of which are included in the *Curriculum in English* – "Health and life skills", and "Democracy and citizenship" – are worth looking at in this presentation of findings as well. The topic of "Health and life skills" aims at pupils' becoming able "to handle situations that require linguistic and cultural competence" as an element of experiencing achievement and thus developing a positive self-image and secure identity (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019).

This interdisciplinary topic primarily highlights an individual perspective. "Democracy and citizenship", on the other hand, is a topic concerned with pupils' view of the world and ability to communicate: "By learning English, the pupils can experience different societies and cultures by communicating with others around the world, regardless of linguistic or cultural background" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019). The curriculum's wording goes quite far in claiming that this experience may even help to prevent prejudices. Clearly, then, there are both individual and societal aspects included in these interdisciplinary topics.

Finally, and returning to the research question presented in the beginning, we can conclude that both concepts, multilingualism and intercultural competence, are well incorporated in the LK20 English curriculum, appearing in its text both separately and in tandem. The following figure visualizes our findings and shows how multilingual and intercultural aspects seem to contribute to a holistic, multilingual and intercultural competence (MIC) in the curriculum:
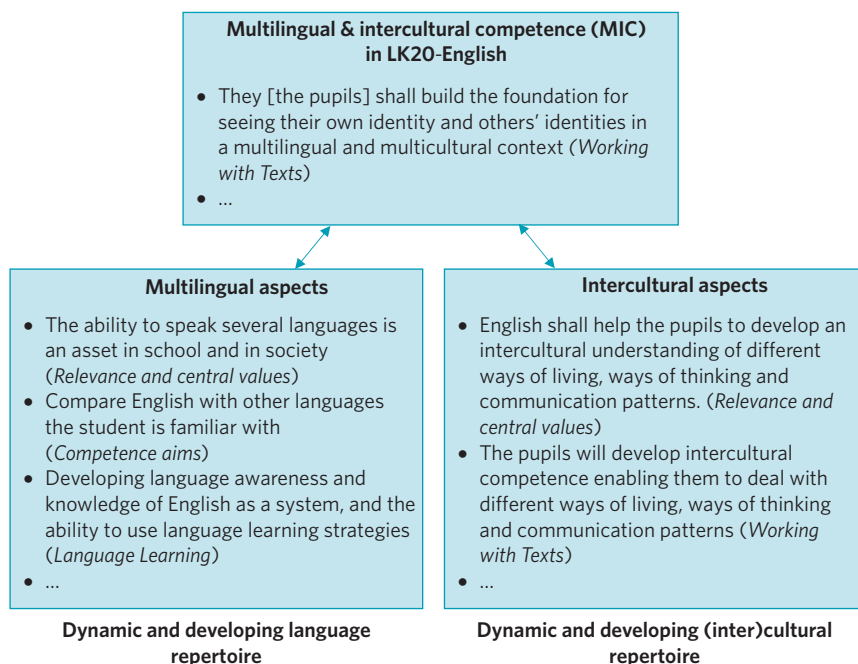
Multilingual & intercultural competence (MIC) in LK20-English

- They [the pupils] shall build the foundation for seeing their own identity and others' identities in a multilingual and multicultural context (*Working with Texts*)
- ...

Multilingual aspects

- The ability to speak several languages is an asset in school and in society (*Relevance and central values*)
- Compare English with other languages the student is familiar with (*Competence aims*)
- Developing language awareness and knowledge of English as a system, and the ability to use language learning strategies (*Language Learning*)
- ...

Dynamic and developing language repertoire

Intercultural aspects

- English shall help the pupils to develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns. (*Relevance and central values*)
- The pupils will develop intercultural competence enabling them to deal with different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns (*Working with Texts*)
- ...

Dynamic and developing (inter)cultural repertoire

Figure 1. Model of Multilingual and Intercultural Competence (MIC)

According to these findings, English as a subject has the potential to be a catalyst for both multilingual and intercultural competence (MIC). The subject of English is presented as an important building block in pupils' dynamic and developing linguistic and (inter)cultural repertoire. More specifically, in English, multilingualism may be promoted by an active, metacognitive approach in the classroom, and through a validation and awareness of all students' multilingual identities (Fisher et al., 2018; Tiurikova et al., 2021). Different multilingual and intercultural repertoires should be valued equally; dialects and regional variants should also be included here. Intercultural competence in the English subject curriculum has a central position given that it encourages self-reflexive questions, moving perspectives in communication, and comparing cultures. It also includes attitudes, skills, and knowledge (Byram, 1997), providing a connection to students' identity development (Norton, 2013). Both concepts are also interlinked, as when it is stated that English "shall build the foundation for seeing their own identity and others' identities in a multilingual and multicultural context", and this shows the importance and opportunity that has been allotted to this particular subject. English is the first additional language studied by all pupils in school regardless of their home languages, and as such, it prepares the ground for more foreign languages to come.

Conclusions and future research

The aim of this study has been to answer the question: In which ways have the concepts of multilingual and intercultural competence been incorporated in English as a subject in Norway's latest educational reform (LK20)?

Our analysis has shown that multilingualism and intercultural competence are promoted and represented both separately and in tandem in the English curriculum, and they are defined as goals for *all* students in the Norwegian state school system. Representations of both concepts include individual and societal aspects, such as identity, communication, intercultural awareness, and prejudice prevention. They prove to be quite close to the declared aims of the Council of

Europe policy presented in the introduction, i.e., language learning, language rights, mutual understanding, democratic citizenship, and social cohesion.

Our findings indicate that English, as the first additional language taught to all pupils from Year 1, has, according to the LK20 curriculum, the potential to be a catalyst for developing pupils' multilingual and intercultural competence. Whether it will be allowed to be this catalyst in practice will depend on teachers and school administrations' interpretations, competence, and attitudes.

Interesting paths for future research could be, firstly, to explore *how* English can be used as a catalyst for further language learning. This would mean looking at language and intercultural repertoires in a holistic perspective, including, and cooperating with, all languages taught in school and encouraging students to include their home languages. Secondly, exploring how the concept of identity in a multilingual and multicultural context is understood or conceptualized in the practice field would be a fruitful future research avenue. Thirdly, examining the question of how pupils themselves consider their linguistic identity and developing linguistic and intercultural repertoire (Fisher et al., 2018) would be an interesting path to follow, as students' perceptions on this topic receive too little focus in current research.

However, as previously mentioned, it is also important to employ a critical viewpoint (Berthelé, 2021) when working in this area. Critical questions should be asked as to how these two educational concepts can be operationalized and assessed in language classrooms. To conduct empirical studies on how educational stakeholders, such as students and teachers, perceive and relate to multilingual and intercultural competence would assist us in gaining a deeper knowledge of these concepts in contemporary and future classrooms.

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