

Bilingualism in a Plurilingual Canada Podcast Series

What is Languageing and How Can it Help us Learn a Second Language,
by Sharon Lapkin

Author

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Summary

Sharon Lapkin explains the concept of languageing, a form of verbalization used to mediate the solutions to complex problems and tasks. Teachers may find useful to encourage their students to use languageing, in order to help them assimilate complex grammar concepts.

Definitions

The concept of languageing is based on Vygotsky's claim that language is one of the most important mediating tools of the mind. Languageing completes our thoughts/cognition/ideas and transforms them into artifacts that allow for further contemplation, which, in turn, transforms thought. While we speak or write, we achieve new or deeper understandings of complex phenomena.

Languageing: A form of verbalization used to mediate the solutions to complex problems and tasks. It is the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language. It is part of the process of learning.

Facts

- Self-explaining or languageing activities have been shown to be effective in curriculum areas such as mathematics or science. They also help language learners to internalize complex grammatical concepts.
- Verbalizing or self-explaining our understanding of complex grammatical concepts leads to a more sophisticated grasp of how French grammar works.

Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT)

The Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers is a non-profit professional association of over 4,000 members.

Through its research, resources and publications, professional development and advocacy activities, the association plays a significant role in increasing awareness, appreciation and understanding of the importance of second and additional language learning and teaching throughout Canada. www.caslt.org

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Podcast Series

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The goal of this initiative is to make current research in second language teaching and learning available to teachers and the general public.

All podcasts from this series can be downloaded from the CASLT and OLBI Web sites.

- Research suggests that the process of learning complex content can be facilitated by using the first or second language as a cognitive tool. The use of the stronger language, often English, mediates the understanding of a concept that is then applied to the understanding of how French 'works.' When learners externalize their thoughts, they come to understand what they did and did not know and what further information they need to complete their understanding. The more they externalized their thoughts, the better able they were to monitor and self-assess them, transforming them from a surface understanding to a deeper conceptual one.

How to Make Language Activities Part of Your Classroom:

1. Decide on the concept you would like students to learn. For example, this might be grammatical gender in French, an aspect of the tense system, relative pronouns, or any grammatical structure that you need to teach.
2. Develop an explanation in writing of the target concept. Make sure to include diagrams or charts if possible, and concrete examples. This is the most demanding part of the activity for the teacher. We suggest consulting several grammar textbooks and writing down your own understanding of the concept.
3. Teach students to verbalize. Model the activity for them and then ask them to work in pairs and explain the text to their partner. Monitor the activity and select one pair of 'high' languagers to demonstrate to the others how they worked their way through the explanation out loud.
4. Have your students reflect on the value of the activity. If they find it useful, assign similar homework activities that allow them to verbalize/language on their own.

Further Reading

Swain, M. (2006). Languaging, agency and collaboration in advanced language proficiency. In H. Byrnes (Ed.), *Advanced language learning: The contribution of Halliday and Vygotsky* (pp. 95-108). London: Continuum.

Swain, M., Lapkin, S., Knouzi, I., Suzuki, W., & Brooks, L. (2009). Languaging: University students learn the grammatical concept of voice in French. *Modern Language Journal*, 93, 5-29.

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