Bilingualism in a Plurilingual Canada Podcast Series

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

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

Definitions
The concept of languaging is based on Vygotsky’s claim that language is one of the most important mediating tools of the mind. Languaging 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.

Languaging:
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 languaging 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.
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 Languaging 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
