

**A CRITICAL EVALUATION AND THE LEARNING STEPS
FOCUSING ON A CASE STUDY OF AN INDIVIDUAL LEARNER
OR A GROUP OF LEARNERS, BASED ON AN OBSERVED
CRITICAL INCIDENT.**

WORD COUNT (EXCLUDING APPENDICES): 4.381

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1. Introduction

This assignment will illuminate a critical incident observed in a secondary school, with the objective of becoming a reflective practitioner and engaging with the principles of reflective teaching. As such it will help to move away from forming judgements based on personal and general knowledge to basing judgements on the theoretical and academic knowledge underpinning the profession of teaching (Tripp, 2011).

A critical incident does not have to be negative, as the term implies, but it can also be beneficial. It represents a noteworthy event that may be utilised to stimulate educational thought and inquiry. (Tripp, 2011). What makes it critical is the observer's interest and analysis of this moment, which means critical incidents are not observed but made (Tripp, 2011).

For this assignment, monitoring was employed to see patterns, trends, and potential areas of improvement. The chosen incident (Multi-language / translanguaging) will be discussed in the context of the new curriculum for Wales, due to the importance it places on international languages and communication (Welsh Government, 2022).

The following sections will look at some key literature to understand both the incident's relevance and the impact of a critical incident analysis. Furthermore, a brief context of the class will be given as well as my own reflections and an outline of further steps.

1.1 Critical incident

The critical incident was observed in a secondary German language class. The students sat in groups facing towards the board engaged in a pair work activity. Beforehand the teacher explained the new topic, Welsh was used to explain vocabulary and later English for grammar. In this sense, translanguaging was used in an attempt to help the students acquire the target language. It appeared as though some of the students found the link with Welsh useful, with other students struggling to use a second language to learn a third.

After the presentation of the new language students did pair work to further practice the new vocabulary. The description of the critical incident will focus on student learning and how their own translanguaging skills were utilised. The description of translanguaging and

its benefits and drawbacks are provided in the section that follows, along with a short summary of significant theories in language acquisition.

2. Relevant literature

As the incident happened in a language class while teaching a foreign language, it is advisable to have a brief overview of how second language learning works. In this essay, early childhood language learning will not be discussed in detail due to length constraints. In the second language learning, there are four distinct perspectives of language acquisition (Lightbown and Spada, 2013). All four perspectives will be summarised and the place of translanguageing within them will be considered.

2.1 Behaviourist perspective

Skinner (1957), an advocate of behaviourism says learning a language is done through habit forming by repetition and reinforcement. A part of behaviourism is also CA (contrastive analysis hypothesis) which states that if the target and first language are similar or have similar structures it is easier to learn though this is widely understood not to be the case if the L1 (first language) and L2 (second language) are significantly different (Lightbown and Spada, 2013).

It was soon discovered that the mistakes learners make cannot be predicted by simply looking at the L1 (Lightbrown and Spada, 2013). In light of this, it has become more apparent that we cannot ignore the L1, as learners notice and identify patterns and similarities between them and decide if this helpful for them, albeit not always consciously (Lightbrown and Spada, 2013). Therefore, translanguageing can make learning a second language much easier for students; especially when there are similarities between the L1 and L2.

After behaviourism was widely rejected, largely due to its criticism by Noam Chomsky (Chomsky, 1959; Lightbrown and Spada, 2013) researchers turned towards a cognitive perspective (Lightbrown and Spada, 2013).

2.2 Innatist perspective

Noam Chomsky said that language acquisition should be understood as something that is impacted by internal mental processes, or cognitive processes, rather than merely something that comes from the outside (Chomsky, 1959 cited in Richards, 2015, p. 33).

Krashen's Monitor Model advances this theory and states that languages are acquired rather than learnt, meaning that we learn a second language largely through exposure, as is the case with infant learning of a first language (Krashen, 1982). For this to happen the input needs to be comprehensible; it needs to be a little more difficult than what we understand but not so much that we do not understand it anymore. It is often referred to as 'i+1' (Lightbrown and Spada, 2013). For this method to work students need to be "ready" for it. If the learner feels tense or anxious, he might not be able to acquire the language no matter how much appropriate input is available (Richards, 2015).

Krashen's theory was also challenged by other researchers saying that the wrong conclusions may have been drawn from the research (White, 1987). It has been established that students will not be able to progress at a certain point without guided instruction and insight into the inner workings of the language (Lightbrown and Spada, 2013). However, comprehensible input is still a technique used in classrooms nowadays especially when looking at content-based and task-based language teaching (Richards, 2015).

2.3 Cognitive perspective

The cognitive perspective views language learning as mental activity. The learner is building their knowledge through exposure and experience. Lipski, Bialystok and Hakuta (1996) said that the learners already bring an understanding of the world, social relations, and knowledge of other languages with them; A learner does not approach new information with a completely receptive mind (with a 'blank slate'), but rather adds new knowledge on top of an existing understanding. The brain is already prepared for learning a second or third language by previous language learning.

The cognitive perspective also attempted to identify where in the brain, languages are stored and if plurilinguals have more than one language system or if all their languages are being combined in one system (Otheguy, Garcia, & Reid, 2015 cited in McSwan 2017, p. 168). This is an area still under investigation, and a definite answer cannot be given. Other research is now focused on the importance of practice and it is thought that practice needs to be interactive, meaningful, and task-focused to achieve effective language learning (Ortega, 2009).

2.4 Social cultural perspective

This perspective views learning as a social interaction where learners co-construct knowledge based on interactions with another person. Learning happens when knowledge is intertwined with a social activity. ZPD (zone of proximal development) falls under this perspective and shares similarities with Krashen's i+1 theory (Lightbrown and Spada, 2013).

2.5 Translanguaging

Cen Williams coined the term "trawsieithu," or translanguaging, in regard to Welsh bilingual education in the 1980s. Translanguaging means to use two or more languages in oral interactions which can lead to a positive transfer between languages and thus to better learning (Conteh, 2018).

The critical incident in this essay is based upon translanguaging in a modern foreign classroom. Using both English and Welsh to learn German.

An example of translanguaging would be to look at links between languages, for instance:

window (English) - das Fenster -[n] (german) - y ffenest [f] (welsh) - la fenêtre [f] (french) - la ventana [f] (Spanish). Students can discover the links between words and retain them better. Furthermore, translanguaging makes it possible to use all languages learners have available to achieve their purpose (Li, 2018b) as well as giving students the possibility of finding links between languages that the teacher might not have identified (Conteh, 2018).

Translanguaging is also viewed as a cognitive process (Baker et al., 2022). Cen Williams viewed translanguaging as using one language for input and another for output. However, this view is very narrow and not in line with what other literature suggests about learning. All previous theories viewed exposure to the language an important part of learning (Lightbrown and Spada, 2013; White, 1987; Richards, 2015). Therefore, translanguaging needs to be viewed as a wider term. Including code-switching (translations) and code-mashing (mixing different languages) techniques.

However, there is also a concern about using several languages in schools or in general language learning. The main concern is that students would not recognize the borders of

the languages and which areas they pass over and which they cannot. Cummins (2017) argues and offers a medium ground in which language borders are uncertain yet speakers recognize language borders. As a result, students can recognize when they can employ a mixture of both languages or only a particular one (Cummins, 2017).

Using translanguaging techniques in the modern foreign language classroom can give students another tool to progress in the new language as well as incorporating the four purposes. For instance, progression stage four, details that students should understand how and why languages evolve and they should be able to communicate in several languages (Welsh government, 2019).

The Estyn report (2014) found out that finding a link between Welsh and English words can have a positive effect on the understanding of the terms in pupils. The same could be said about understanding a concept or word in German.

Nowadays the main method of language teaching outside of the concept of comprehensive schools is a communicative approach (Richards, 2015; Thornbury, 2006) which is now also included in the curriculum for Wales meaning that learning is an outcome of meaningful conversation (Richards, 2015). It requires learners to use their communication skills to “negotiate meaning” (Breen and Candlin, 1980). However, this strategy also poses dangers to students not paying attention to accuracy and pronunciation as the main goal is successful communication. This part of mastering the language will have to be supported by the teacher (Richards, 2015). This approach is based on the socio-cultural and cognitive perspective.

2.5.1 Advantages and disadvantages of translanguaging

Hornberger and Link found out that translanguaging can remove barriers in communication and help to develop students' language competencies. Furthermore, translanguaging can also create a friendly culture in class in which all languages and cultures are accepted and respected (Celic and Seltzer, 2011). Another advantage is that it has an impact on reading comprehension (Canagarajah, 2011a).

Using translanguaging techniques, also changes the position of the teacher in the classroom. They can go from being the main instructor to being a co-learner (Garcia,

Johnson, and Seltzer, 2017). Moreover, using translanguaging in the classroom can be empowering for students (Rajendram, 2023) and give them confidence.

However, when looking at the literature, most translanguaging incidents are described with a learner who is already fluent in a second language (Rajendram, 2023; Conteh, 2018; Baker et. al, 2022). For example, student A is fluent in English and Welsh and uses both languages to infer meaning in German.

The Welsh language survey in June 2023 found out that 29,2% (889,700) over three years old can speak Welsh, which suggests that at least 70% of the students in an English medium school are unlikely to be fluent Welsh speakers. In light of this and that described above, problems may arise, if Welsh is used as a base for translanguaging techniques.

Translanguaging can also lead to students using their preferred language (most likely English) rather than the target language. It can also discourage them from staying in the target language (Zheng, 2021) and trying to find ways to make up for their deficits in the language in a more creative way.

3. Case Study

3.1 What happened?

During the lesson, the teacher used a mix of languages to engage and help students understand the target language (German). The teacher used English to instruct students and to give them an overview of the lesson aims. The aims of this lesson were to understand and name various parts of a house (e.g., die Tür, das Fenster). The teacher used pictures and the Welsh language to convey the meaning of the new vocabulary.

In the explanation of the next task the teacher used English but told the students to speak German in task and if needed, to substitute missing words in Welsh or English. The task then was set out to be completed in pairs and students had pictures of different houses to be used to complete a jigsaw-information, gap task.

This one example of a conversation between the students I looked at for my critical incident:

[...]

A: Meine Tür ist blau und das Fenster hat eine andere Farbe. (*My door is blue and the window is a different colour*)

B: Welche Farbe hat ***die ffenest?** (*Which colour does the window have?*)

A: ***Die Fenster** ist gelb. (*The window is yellow*).

[...]

Noticeable in this conversation is the use of the Welsh word for window with the German feminine article (the article in German is neutral, hence the asterisk) in one of the students' utterances. The teacher was monitoring this group at the time and gave praise to the student using Welsh to supply the missing word. She also reminded them of the German word and that even though the word is remarkably similar the gender of the noun is different in German.

This is a critical incident for this pupil's learning and progression as they use all the linguistic resources they have to complete a task. It also shows a level of independence and resilience which is ingrained in the four purposes (Pedwar diben y cwricwlwm i Gymru The four purposes of the curriculum for Wales, n.d.).

3.2 What could have been the intended consequences?

By using Welsh in the vocabulary interaction, the teacher might have wanted to make the learning easier for the students as some of the words are similar to the target language. One of the class intentions was to facilitate real conversation about a topic between learners. By giving them the option of using all the languages they have available to them they had more opportunities to use the learnt languages without being hindered by not knowing a certain word. It also shows a connection to the new Curriculum for Wales.

3.3 Impact on the learner and progress

The students were profiting from the approach of allowing all languages in the classroom and being able to speak more freely and communicatively than they could have done in a target language only classroom. However, some students struggled with the amount of Welsh used in the lesson, because they did not have strong Welsh skills. In general, the class was engaged and made full use of different translanguaging approaches to achieve the goal of having a conversation about different houses.

3.4 Links to literature and the curriculum for Wales

Showing links between languages is a clear example of wider translanguaging approaches, for instance code-mashing (using pictures and other languages) and code-switching (translations). There can also be links drawn to other learning theories such as the multilingualism and Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) Theory: socio-culture learning theory and the contrast analysis hypothesis amongst others. I will only investigate the three named theories due to the constraints of this assignment.

One of the students used the Welsh word for window because it sounds and looks remarkably similar. That is an example of where similarities can be used to learn a new language. It is an example of the contrast analysis hypothesis made by Lado (1957).

B: Welche Farbe hat ***die ffenest?** (Which colour does the window have?)

A: ***Die Fenster** ist gelb. (The window is yellow).

However, the contrast analysis hypothesis does not consider the interlanguage students may have. Interlanguage here refers to the dynamic and involving linguistic system students have and are developing (Lightbrown and Spada, 2013). Another criticism is the lack of insight into the strategies students use to learn and to overcome problems. Also not factoring in the mistakes students might make which are not regular and systematic. Meaning that learners do not always produce the same mistakes in the same context or situation (Spada and Lightbrown, 2013).

The CUP gives more insight into how a language might be acquired by a student who speaks more than one language or has access to more than one language system. CUP says that L1 and L2 proficiencies are not separate but intrinsically linked (Cummins 1981). The learner has an underlying proficiency and that supports the acquisition of the language. Due to this underlying proficiency, learners can transfer knowledge across language boundaries (Goodrich and Lonigan, 2018) For example, using the Welsh word but the German article, knowing it is similar and that the noun genders function in an equivalent way.

One of the criticisms of this study is the emphasis on the cognitive factors of learning but forgetting contextual factors of language learning e.g., social interaction, cultural context,

and communicative competence (Grosjean, 1997). In the incident, observed social interaction and communicative competence played a big part in the task's achievement. The students were engaged in a social interaction, helping each other with the unfamiliar vocabulary as well as showing a communicative competence by being creative in their language use rather than being defeated by their lack of vocabulary in the L2.

This interaction is a clear example of socio-cultural learning, in other words learning happens through social interaction and sometimes with the help of a MOK (more knowledgeable other) (Richards, 2015). The Sociocultural Theory was coined by Vygotsky in the early mid-20 century; in this theory he introduced the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is the zone where students can work independently with adequate scaffolding and the help of a peer or teacher (Richards, 2015). The support or scaffolding will gradually be reduced until the learner can do the task by themselves. In the critical incident, students helped each other, and then the teacher or MOK intervened, helping until the student finished the task by themselves. The theory also highlights the idea that collaborative learning promotes social interaction and shared understanding. It shows that learning is a social activity.

However, this theory was criticised because of its focus on the social component and almost forgetting about the cognitive processes. Another criticism is the over-emphasis on collaborative learning to the detriment of individual reflection and independent learning (Lightbrown and Spada. 2013).

In this critical incident many different theories played a role as outlined above. Students needed the scaffolding, collaborative working and awareness of the similarities and differences between languages in order to be successful. By giving students the freedom of using all of their linguistic abilities (i.e. languages other than the targeted one) they had the possibility of a greater learning uptake.

Furthermore, the ability and possibility to use more than one language is also entrenched in the new curriculum for Wales. One of the aims of the new Curriculum for Wales is to equip learners with the knowledge to navigate a multilingual world and to understand and appreciate other cultures, as well as their own (Welsh government, 2022). Another aim is to recognize similarities and differences between languages and cultures (The Curriculum for Wales - Statements of What Matters Code WG21-78, n.d.). By using this approach, students were able to fulfil some of the new curriculum's statements. Furthermore, by

using translanguaging and making use of all the knowledge students possess, students become not only ambitious and capable learners but also ethical and informed ones (Pedwar diben y cwricwlwm i Gymru The four purposes of the curriculum for Wales, n.d.).

4. Discussion

Translanguaging gives learners the possibility to be in control of their own learning and the opportunity to use all their knowledge to make sense of a new language or to improve in various languages at the same time.

I will discuss the observed critical incident through Brookfield lenses (1985) to encompass all areas of reflective practice.

4.1 Autobiographical Lense

Translanguaging as a teaching method seemed very elusive at the beginning but seeing the underlying learning theories and how to use it effectively in teaching gave a new appreciation of its utility despite some its inherent flaws.

My philosophy of teaching had previously been to use only the target language in the classroom and to exclude the students L1 as much as possible. However, through this analysis of the critical incident I have changed my perspective to include an appreciation of using L1 in the classroom as it seems beneficial for students to have more opportunities to communicate and co-construct their knowledge without being constrained by a lack of L2 knowledge.

Furthermore, it showed the importance of investigating links between languages and how that can help students improve. As well as being mindful of the differences between languages and what that means from a teaching perspective.

4.2 Student's view

Students were allowed to use any language they wanted to complete providing the task was carried out predominantly in German. One of the students reverted to Welsh to fulfil the task, when I asked them why they chose to say the word in Welsh rather than in their first language they reported that they knew it was a similar word, but could not remember the German word and that they could see the Welsh translations of the word on the board. Additionally they did not want to revert to English and “give up”.

The student was proud of himself that he not only spoke one “foreign” language but two. The freedom to use two or more languages gave this student the chance to try out different learning systems and allowed him to be successful, engendering a greater sense of achievement and motivation. This type of motivation can be described with the self-determination theory (SDT). Although the theory was developed in the study of learning English as a second language (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011), it describes the motivation behind achieving something. There are two types of motivation according to this theory: extrinsic (an external force is motivating them e.g. exams, parents) and intrinsic motivation (an internal force e.g. enjoyment, desire to learn). The student was intrinsically motivated as they enjoyed the task and engaged in the activity and felt great achievement after completing the task.

4.3 Colleagues' view

When I tried to use translanguaging approaches like code-switching and code-mashing students stayed in their comfort zone of not using the target language at all. Moreover, I fell into the trap of using English and Welsh more than I would normally do and not using the target language enough. This reliance on English or Welsh, is one of the earlier identified dangers of translanguaging, as it can hinder experimentation with the target language.

The advice I was given is to monitor language use and to gradually take away some of the freedom of translanguaging in order for the student to become more comfortable in the language they are learning.

The teacher I observed did not seem to have any problems with my described difficulties. Hence, I was also advised to observe the teacher in other classes to note the differences and how they achieve the balance between all the different languages.

4.4 Theoretical view

The literature as described above gives valuable insights into the use of translanguaging in some of the underlying learning theories the teacher I observed might have employed. To make translanguaging successful in the classroom several things need to be considered.

- Which languages are spoken in the classroom?
- Does the teacher speak those language as well?
- How similar or different are they from the target language?

- How can they help students to achieve their goal?
- How can students be pushed to use the target language without losing the benefits of translanguageing?

Learning is a social interaction (Vygotskiĭ, 2012; Lightbrown and Spada, 2013), therefore measures need to be implemented to make all languages welcome and to be able to draw on several languages. By looking at the similarities and differences between languages learning can be enhanced as similar features are learnt with ease whereas differences are harder to grapple with (Richards, 2015).

Moreover, since students already come with an understanding of languaging learning (the concepts and features) into the classroom (Lipski, Bialystock and Hakuta, 1996), we should make use of this underlying knowledge instead of ignoring it.

However, we also need to tread carefully so as not to discourage students from using the target language and making them overly reliant on their first language (Zheng, 2021).

Zheng says that putting specific translanguageing times for a task can help with this.

Alternatively, students can be encouraged to use translanguageing when they are communicating for the sake of communication, but encouraged to reduce the amount of translanguageing when they are acquiring a new feature of the target language.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

The critical reflection of the learning of these two students helped to understand the limitations of only target language teaching as well as seeing the benefits of allowing several languages in the class. For instance, the danger of over-reliance on the language students are comfortable with and not using the target language. However, seeing the student's creative use of Welsh, English, and other languages they had available, demonstrated that allowing the use of other languages increases learning and communication in the classroom. This is supported by the students themselves remarking at how useful this resource was.

As said by Zheng (2021), Baker et. al (2022), Canagarajah (2011) translanguageing can be a huge benefit to students when engaging in the learning of a new language.

Translanguageing can also be beneficial when students engage with the world outside of Wales or outside of their “cynefin” as this may help them in achieving effective

communication and obtaining a better understanding of the differences between languages and cultures.

Through the process of observing translanguaging and language teaching in general I was able to gain new insights into the profession rather than stagnating and not reflecting on my own practice. Moreover, through the critical incident methodology of Tripp (2011), I was able to dive into the methodologies behind language teaching and develop my understanding of the new curriculum for Wales. Due to this, I believe the way forward for me is to encourage the use of other languages but also to reflect on how and why they are to be utilised in the classroom, insofar as avoiding a reliance on L1 (English/Welsh) and challenging students.

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OBSERVATION / FIELD NOTES

Record 1

Date and time, year group: [REDACTED]

Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context

German:

- learning to describe houses
- inside of houses
- past tense

Akusativ + Dativ
→ review
- groups
- mini whiteboards

What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work)

conversation between 2 using mix Welsh, English, German

A: Meine Tür ist blau und das Fenster hat eine andere Farbe.

B: Welche Farbe hat die fenest? Welsh → fen?

A: Die Fenster ist gelb.

article? = Teacher: Remember the article? → different from all languages
- The word is almost like Welsh...

- linking German vocab to English & Welsh
→ a lot of Welsh students wrote down

Areas of possible exploration: what you think could be "under the hood" in these incidents?

What avenues of research could you consider?

- translanguaging
- motivation (Börnyei?)
- Socio culture learning
→ learn from each other

Chomsky?
innat?

Welsh level?
→ not everyone speaks to
→ good level

1 min → 2050 now?

Notes: any details you can note (is it a busy environment, is it after lunch, are there lots of distractions, are directions made explicit - the more you can refer to the better here)

- groups
- using every one speaking
- teacher walking around + support, answering questions
- mini whiteboards to go over previous learning
- instructions English
vocab Welsh
- fast in German

promise using
Welsh, not going back
to English

Student:

- didn't want to give up.
- know Welsh & German similar
- see words on board

* similar / different languages
→ easier when similar
code mixing + switching
→ check board