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Construction of a discursive community during a lesson study. An example of geography in a primary French-speaking class

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyse language activity during a research lesson in geography with pupils aged 8 to 12, in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. We highlight the role of discursive modes in the construction of a discursive disciplinary community.

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Keywords: lesson study; secondarisation; discursive community

Introduction

The lesson study group in geography was set up in June 2015 due to a concern we had as trainer-researchers at the university of teacher education in Lausanne, Switzerland. We were seeking to better understand the processes of ‘secondarisation’ (Bautier & Goigoux, 2004; Philippot & Bouissou, 2006) in the teaching of social science in primary schools (aged 8 to 12) and, on the other hand, to implement new teaching methods in geography. We appealed to teachers interested in the subject and subsequently launched a lesson study that lasted two consecutive years. In this article, we present analyses based on data collected during the first year of work, highlighting links between language practices and pupils’ learning.

Conceptual framework

Our work brings together two theoretical perspectives: the first, known as historical-cultural, socio-historical or vygostkian (named after its precursor Vygotski), elaborated in the works of Bodrova and Brunner amongst others in the English-speaking world and Brossard, Schneuwly, and Rochex in the French-speaking world. The second, known as enunciative, was developed by Benveniste, Bakhtine and Jacques and more recently by Charaudeau, Maingeneau and Nonnon¹.

As a follow-up to these works, we explored the concepts of ‘secondarisation’ (Bautier, 2006, Bautier & Goigoux, 2004, Philippot & Bouissous, 2006) and the discursive community (Bernier, 2004; Jaubert, 2007), two concepts that are fundamental to our research.

¹ We make no reference to particular articles here, as they are so numerous. An Internet search will produce the necessary information to readers who are motivated to read further.

Secundarisation

The term 'secundarisation' refers to a process that is characterized by a shift in pupils' approach to understanding the world and knowledge from a practical point of view to one that is symbolic (Philippot & Bouissou, 2006).

Bautier (2006) points out that some learning difficulties are linked to the process of secundarisation. Indeed, some pupils face difficulties identifying the cognitive issues and knowledge objects presented in school tasks and activities. For example, when performing tasks such as colouring puzzles according to numbers, some pupils usually say they are learning to colour, while others say they are learning numbers. Thus, in a given task, pupils do not all have the same understanding of the learning issues aimed at by the teaching. Some pupils invest in school tasks with first-order thinking centred on 'doing' that is spontaneous and anchored in specific experience and particular situations; action takes precedence over the activity and immediate success. Other pupils employ second-order thinking that is reflective and generic, where specific situations are gradually de-contextualized and knowledge is generalized, and situations are understood in their different spontaneous and scientific dimensions. The logic of these pupils is that of "learning", in which a reconfigured relationship to the real world takes precedence.

The term "secundarisation" has its origins in the work of Bakhtin (1984) who distinguishes different genres in literary production. Transferred to the field of educational sciences, the notion allows us to consider language practices as indicators of secundarisation. When a pupil expresses himself, he makes use of diverse and heterogeneous language genres. In doing so, he indicates the genre in which he is situated and thus the coherence of his discourse can be related to the positioning expected of him in his sphere of activity (Bautier & Goigoux, 2004).

Discursive community

During classroom exchanges, pupils as well as the teacher express themselves according to their own points of view. The class thus appears, as a socio-discursive space in which knowledge and other objects of discourse are at first heterogeneous; each speaker expressing different 'voices', different points of view. Progressively, through confrontation, negotiation and justification and differing discourses move closer together. An order emerges that "reorganises discourses according to certain properties, makes adjustments, reformulations, extracting propositions from their initial, singular context." The result is a discursive community "organized around certain practices, values and 'scholarly' knowledge constructed by and subjected to the criticism of its members" (Jaubert, 2007: 113). This is the case with the acquisition of school knowledge. "Each participant can thus formulate a statement by explaining it, questioning it, conceptualizing it, etc., distancing himself from it or adhering to it" (Breithaupt, 2017, p. 10). Authors speak of a discursive community of school subject-matters (Bernié, 2002, Jaubert, Rebière & Bernié, 2003, Jaubert, Rebière, 2012).

Research questions

Beyond the work of Philippot (2008, 2009), Le Marec (2007) and Pache (2012), there are relatively few works about secundarisation in teaching humanities and social science, particularly in geography. In the context of primary education, Philippot's work shows that teachers themselves have not developed a second-order relationship to the subjects taught, despite their training. Consequently, they restrict themselves to teaching tasks requiring little reflective capacity. Le Marec highlights the omnipresence of the teachers' discourse and the relative absence of it in pupils. In her thesis, Pache shows the predominance of certain words related to the everyday life, to the detriment of concepts derived from university-based geography.

We therefore raise two questions:

- 1) What is the nature of language use in a geography lesson?

- 2) In relation to the first question, what are the indicators of a secondarisation process within the framework of teaching geography?

Methodology

Our methodology is a part of a training-research process called "lesson study". Inspired by the Japanese tradition *Jugyou kenkyuu*, 'lesson study' is the English translation of a secular Japanese practice that has only relatively recently been adopted in the francophone world.

"What characterizes lesson studies (LS) is that, first they are carefully planned on the basis of a teaching or learning problem by a group of teachers, sometimes in association with researchers or university professors. They are focused on the teaching and learning process of pupils (Lewis & Tsuchida, 1997, Takahashi & McDougal, 2015). Second, they take place under the observation of peers or school partners. Finally, they are recorded and discussed, sometimes with people from outside the set-up, qualified as experts (what Takahashi, 2014, calls knowledgeable others). The impact of the approach can be measured in terms of improvements in teaching practices, dissemination of new content, the linking of prescriptions and practices (Lewis & Tsuchida, 1998), and bringing together the worlds of practitioners and researchers (Clerc-Georgy & Clivaz, 2016)" (Breithaupt, 2017, pp. 7-8).

The LS system implemented in the current research took place from September 2015 to June 2016. Four teachers and two teacher-researchers were involved and the LS took the form of three cycles. The first required four preparatory meetings each of which demanded about two hours before the first research lesson which was followed by a small break for debriefing. The second cycle, comprising both of an analysis of the first research lesson and a reorientation for a second research lesson, required two encounters. The same was true for the third cycle, which ended with an evaluation of the overall approach. Figure 1 schematizes the three cycles.

Figure 1: LS schema

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| Prep 1 | Prep 2 | Prep 3 | Prep 4 | Research Lesson 1 Debriefing | Analysis Prep 1 | Analysis Prep 2 | Research Lesson 2 Debriefing |
| Analysis Prep 1 | Analysis Prep 2 | Research Lesson 3 Debriefing | Assesment | | | | |

In this article, we intend to focus on data from the first two research lessons that we have filmed and the transcription of it, which constitutes our corpus.

The knowledge that "learning is the result of overcoming contradictions and tensions generated in the classroom, which, in terms of language, presupposes the construction of a relevant enunciative position, the ability to situate oneself by one's discourse, by the genre adopted, in the sphere of a discipline-based exchange, leads us to clearly assume a certain number of values and presuppositions and simultaneously renounce others" (Jaubert, 2007, p. 99). We thus briefly describe the lesson as planned, we then analyse some extracts verbatim. We concentrate on a relatively emblematic activity in humanities and social science, namely the creation of a list of non-exhaustive elements for classification. The analysis is that of speech and the content of interactions (Bardin, 1997).

We are particularly interested in the knowledge expressed by pupils and the teacher during the production of a list, seeking to identify possible points of view expressed (from daily life or

spontaneous experience or, more scientifically, as the observations of a geographer). Then, we try to identify the mode or modes of construction of the discursive community during the interactions. We rely on the work of Jacques (1991), reprinted by Nonnon (1997) and use the following categories:

- the *dialogue mode* enables a dialogue between different enunciative voices and, as such, is capable of inducing learning. Indeed, this mode allows for the highlighting of possible opposing or complementary positions, by seeking to agree on what can be considered to be true. In a way, the dialogue mode opens up a dialectic (in reference to Aristotle and as opposed to “the eristic dialogue, where it is first necessary to prevail over the adversary, implying an indifference to truth”, Perelman, 1989, quoted by Nonnon, 1997, 14).
- the *conversation mode* regroups exchanges that express a feeling of belonging to a community, via relational aspects or by the way speakers address each other.
- the *negotiation mode* concerns exchanges aimed at reaching a compromise or a consensus on various points of view expressed without a dialectic being established. Here, it is a question of negotiating points of view, without examining the proposals, and in the process doing away with the tensions that potentially generate learning.

Results and analysis

The lesson study implemented here pursues the following objectives (excerpted from the official curriculum in the French-speaking part of Switzerland):

- *Identify different parts of a place and the relationships between them, their functions and uses (habitat, leisure, supply, exchanges, reception, passage, activity, transformation, ...).*
- *Locate and identify the means used (human-related facilities) to:*
 - *distinguish areas and mark their boundaries,*
 - *link different places, areas, territories,*
 - *embellish, secure, attract,*
 - *avoid/reduce problems caused to people and the environment.*

The central concept at stake in this objective is the organization of space and the lesson has been organized into five phases:

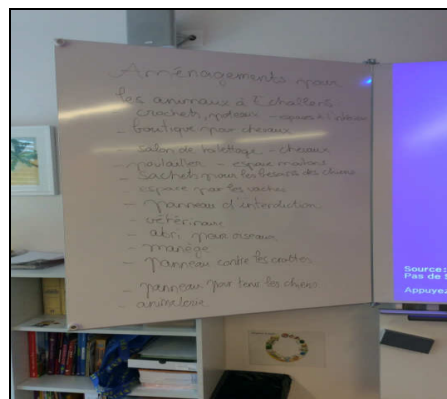
- 1) Collectively list facilities for animals identified along the way to school.
- 2) Plot the home-school itinerary on a map.
- 3) Symbolise the facilities identified.
- 4) Compare maps to identify areas of development.
- 5) Write a text explaining what has been learnt.

To improve understanding of linguistic practices and the process of secondarisation, the lessons were transcribed verbatim. Our analysis here focuses on the development of the list of facilities identified on the home-school route during the first and second research lesson. For each lesson, we present some salient and emblematic elements, allowing us to highlight links between language practice and learning.

First research lesson

The first research lesson lasted an hour and a half. During the first phase of the lesson, the following elements appeared chronologically:

1. Equestrian shop
2. Dog grooming salon
3. Dog poop disposal bags
4. Forbidden signs
5. Bird shelters
6. Signs against dog poop
7. Signs for dogs
8. Hooks, poles
9. Hen house
10. Enclosure for cows
11. Vet
12. Manege
13. Pet shop
14. Space for sheep
15. Indoor space



Analysing the interactions that lead to the establishment of this list, we first notice that the pupils do not state what they actually found on their way to school. As soon as the first child proposed the "horse shop", the second proposes the "dog grooming salon". The list is constituted by association of ideas, not by the restitution of observations. This way of proceeding is not structured and will result in the feeling of juxtaposed tasks, with no explicit link between them. The activity of geographer embodied in the objectives is, as a result, barely accessible.

Secondly, it should be noted that during the process, some proposals are retained and placed on the board, while others are rejected. The two excerpts below illustrate this phenomenon.

Louis's proposition which is not retained:

| | |
|---------|--|
| Teacher | ((note on the chart)) mmm hooks hooks poles ok. Louis, you raised your hand ? |
| Louis | Home. |
| Teacher | Home? |
| Louis | yeah for my cat. |
| Teacher | yes but then it's not expressly for your cat? |
| Louis | yes but downstairs there is a place with cushions. |
| Pupils | <u>Yes me too</u> |
| Teacher | OK what is the difference between what's inside your house and what's on the street outside? What is the difference between just the place where you gonna put small pillows just and hooks and poop bags? |
| Louis | it's for all dogs. |
| Teacher | this is really for your pets and it is you who put them there. so maybe we will -that would make a little too much to list if one were to take the elements of each. Guillaume? |

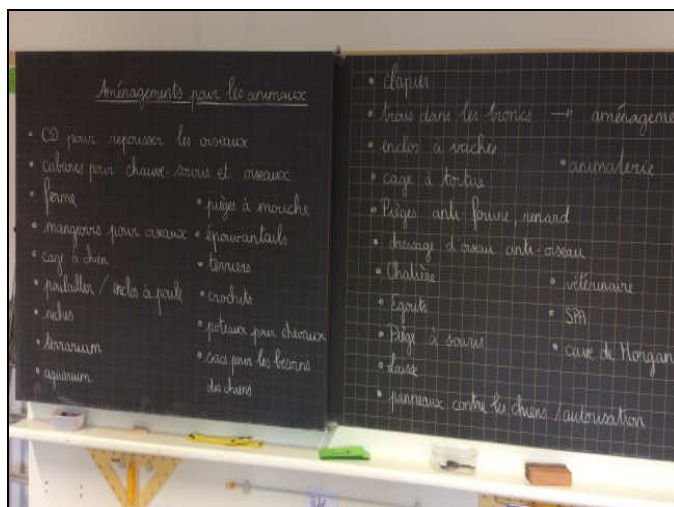
Guillaume's proposition that was retained:

| | |
|---------|--|
| Gui. | a chicken house. |
| Teacher | a chicken house ? |
| Gui. | yes there there are doves. |
| Teacher | yes but are you speaking again about your house? |
| Gui. | my chicken house and the one that belongs to my neighbours. my neighbours' barn. |
| Teacher | OK, if you - well I want you to stay focused on the things humans have built but that are most likely outside your home. |
| Gui. | Yes they built it and it is outside their home. |
| Teacher | but it is not yours ? |
| Gui. | No. |
| Teacher | Ok. What's the name again? |
| Gui. | a chicken house. |
| Teacher | a chicken house - and then? Elliott? |

These two extracts provide some insight into language practices involved in negotiation. Indeed, for pupils it's a question of stating propositions that will be retained or rejected depending on their arguments and what underpins them. The cat house is refused, without evoking the nuance between public and private facilities. The henhouse is accepted because Guillaume shows that it meets the teacher's requirements: it is built by humans, outside their home and they do not own it. The teacher uses first order language. Second-order vocabulary such as "layout", "public or private space" is absent. Instead there is mention of "things" or of what is built in or out of pupils' dwellings. The interaction continues until the whiteboard is covered with proposals. The activity is then considered complete.

This has at least two consequences. The first is that the pupils act, moving forward tentatively, trying to guess the teacher's expectations, arguing in favour of their proposal so that it is written up on the board. The purpose of the task is thus diverted from its primary aim of constituting a list of facilities observed on the way to school. What's more, the end of this phase of the lesson is dictated by the lack of space on the board. The second is that the necessary dialectic to be established by the study of the different propositions cannot be achieved. Indeed, part of the classification, that the pupils are unaware of, springs from the acceptance or rejection of the teacher's proposals. Understanding the term 'planning' in this context cannot be achieved and the rest of the lesson, which consists in identifying the different areas planned for animals, is jeopardised.

The lesson study makes it possible to highlight these phenomena and the group decides to retain all the pupils' proposals during the second research lesson. In addition, having become aware of the difficulties of conceptualizing the word 'planning', it is decided that, following the list, pupils will categorize the facilities in order to be able to identify the characteristics of each (e.g. intentionally manufactured by 'man for animals').



Second research lesson

This second lesson lasts 45 minutes. By observing the image provided here, the reader will notice that pupils' proposals are more numerous than during the first lesson. There are 34 in all. In fact, practically no proposal is rejected by the teacher. However, analysing the process, it is apparent that, here too, the class loses sight of its initial task (listing facilities on the path to school) and ideas are emitted by association. Some proposals are sufficiently strange in the eyes of the teacher, who asks pupils to limit themselves to the area around the school, yet she accepts most propositions without prior judgment.

This constraint to accept all propositions produces changes in the interaction. In the following example, Malo proposes "holes in trees" (which does not quite fit the definition of planned developments). The teacher retains the proposal, which makes Lou react. The teacher lets some uncertainty prevail by indicating that the characteristic of 'size' will be raised later.

| | |
|---------|---|
| Malo | Holes in the trees for anim... I mean for birds or the ... |
| Teacher | Holes in trees ((TURNS TO WRITE BUT CHANGES HER MIND)) the holes um when you see a hole um you mean there in the trunk? ((POINTS OUT THE WINDOW)) |
| Malo | Yes |
| Teacher | OK ((WRITES HOLES IN TRUNKS ON BLACK BOARD 12 SEC)) what else, Lou |
| Lou | But it fact it's it's um from holes um in the trunk but if the hole is too small it is too natural but if we were to make it we would make it a little bigger [...] |
| Teacher | But why would you not agree that we chose holes in trees then |
| Lou | It's not that I don't agree but it should be big enough for us to remark [...] we can remark it. That depends on the size |
| Teacher | So is it a natural development or not depending on its size? We will see, hey? What we say then. What else |

A short while later, Malo suggests “the basement”, a similar suggestion to that mentioned in the first research lesson. The reaction here is also different:

| | |
|---------|--|
| Malo | Um, well, the basement, because my cat is always going in there [...] |
| Jane | The basement, really, I don't agree with Malo because I don't know if they made it for him, it's the cat- |
| Malo | Yes because we put little things there for him and then we put a bowl of food |
| Jane | In that case you could almost say that you organised (STRESSING THE POINT) a little corner for him in the basement well I say you didn't convert your basement rather it is the cat that wanted to go in there it's not you that built your basement |
| Malo | Yes it was my grandfather that built the basement ((SEVERAL PUPILS LAUGH)) [...] |
| Teacher | Raise your hand those who want to keep the basement frankly I accept I don't care one way or the other ((COUNTS RAISED HANDS)) oh but we are going to write we are going to write Malo's basement |

This extract highlights a discussion of the definition of ‘planned developments’. Jane and Malo disagree. The teacher takes no position but lets the pupils debate and eventually has them vote for the presence of the term on the board.

An analysis of the language activity during this lesson reveals first-order and sometimes second-order language, allowing an emergent conceptualization of the notion of planned development. The discursive modes vary according to pupils’ propositions, moving from conversation to the beginnings of dialectic, while sometimes modes seem to be taking on a negotiation mode. We can see the emergence of a dialectic through the different positions of the pupils confronted with the proposals made.

What determines the end of this first phase of the lesson is actually the end of the lesson itself. Indeed, while a phase of categorization of the elements noted on the board was being planned, the time of the lesson had already elapsed².

Conclusion

The analysis of language practices during the construction of a list or inventory in geography allows us to highlight the role of discursive modes in the construction of a discursive disciplinary community. More specifically, we show that the dialogue mode provokes interactions enabling the creation of a dialectic capable of allowing the construction of disciplinary knowledge. This is probably an indicator of the secondarisation process.

On the other hand, a second indicator could be linked to the acceptance of the heterogeneity of pupils’ responses. Indeed, each answer highlights the order in which the pupils are speaking. Taking into account the different positions expressed, it is possible to enable pupils to go beyond them, transforming first-order conceptions into second-order knowledge.

Finally, the lesson study, conceived as a research device, also seems to have effects on teachers and researchers who are called upon to ‘secondarise’ teaching practices. Indeed, the different phases

² This led the LS group to change its focus on categorization during the third and final research lesson. However, the analysis of the latter is not the subject of this article. To sum up briefly, the results confirm the hypothesis that there are links between language practices and pupils’ learning.

of collective preparation and analysis lead to a particular point of view on the learning process and the teaching-learning process itself. In other words, the lesson study focuses on practitioners' and researchers' attention on the general characteristics of teaching and learning and no longer only on the characteristics of a particular teacher in a particular context. As such, the lesson study is a very promising professional development tool.

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