

Poetry and linguistic contrasts

Attention to language in the class room

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Synopsis

In this article we analyse a multilingual poetry project, looking at how it facilitates metalinguistic conversations amongst school pupils, and by way of those conversations, their metalinguistic awareness. The question we ask is: *How can poetry be used didactically in order to promote metalinguistic awareness in a linguistically heterogeneous school class?* The project is tried out in a year 6 class in Oslo (ages 10-11). Poetry in many languages – both through reading and writing – is used in the analysis in order to examine what Bialystok (2001) and others call linguistic attention, an attention to linguistic phenomena. This type of linguistic attention is a prerequisite for starting an internal process to increase that which since early research into literacy and bilingualism researchers have called metalinguistic awareness (Birdsong 1989, Yaden & Templeton 1986).

Introduction

In recent years, a large volume of research into bilingualism has been published in the academic press; the learning of language, motivation and forming of identity. The Norwegian legal framework has changed, and now stipulates that all teaching is to be inclusive and adapted to the pupils, taking the pupils' resources as its starting point. Even so, the many multilingual schools in Oslo are for the most part failing to draw on their pupils' home languages as a teaching resource. Research undertaken by Kulbrandstad, Bakke, Danbolt & Engen (2008), shows this to be the case. They "recommend that all schools in the future make use of the pupils' varied language and cultural backgrounds as a resource for the whole school." (Kulbrandstad et al. 2008:39, our translation). The authorities have also described the situation in the schools and given advice on the steps to be taken. The so called Østberg group, commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Research to look into "teaching offered to children, youth and adults speaking minority languages", maintains:

If the aim of an inclusive school is to be achieved, diversity in culture and language should be acknowledged as being the norm in any class room, where every individual's contribution to the learning community is valued. This, again, may be an argument in favour of making more room for the pupils' first languages in the teaching. (NOU 7: 2010, from chapter 5 "The language situation", our translation)

Descriptions and recommendations like those given above may be seen as a didactic response to some of the goals for language teaching in the national curriculum for Norwegian as a subject, as set out in the strategy document called *The Knowledge Promotion/LK 06* (Kunnskapsdepartementet ('Ministry of Education and Research'), 2006). The LK06 goals, expressed as a high level of understanding of bilingualism and an ability to compare languages, are ambitious. LK06 also expresses that the core area of *Language and Culture* "comprises Norwegian and Nordic languages, but with international perspectives" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2006, the Norwegian section, our translation). At the end of the first year of upper secondary education, the pupils are furthermore expected to be able to explain multilingualism and give examples of how linguistic and cultural co-existence can contribute to changes in the language and to cultural awareness, and to explain grammatical peculiarities of the Norwegian language compared to other languages.

In this article, we point out some of the prerequisites for successful didactics where one draws on a larger part of the language skills of a linguistically heterogeneous school class. The specific research question we seek to answer is: *How can poetry be used didactically in order to promote metalinguistic awareness in a linguistically heterogeneous school class?* An important part of the answer can be found in how poetry gives rise to opportunities for the teacher to tie the experiences many multilingual pupils have at home to things they experience at school. The idea is that linguistic resources relevant to the pupil are brought in to the class room and used there, without the teacher needing to be an expert in the pupil's home language.

Multilingualism and Identity

In a linguistically heterogeneous group of pupils, different languages will be represented, in different ways. Also those pupils who speak (only) Norwegian at home, will have learnt English at school from their first year there. These pupils can also, in their own way, be considered multilingual. But does their identity per se include a multilingual identity? The concept *multilingual identity* has been used by Svendsen (2006) as a re-writing of the concept of multilinguality from Aronin og Ó Laoire (2004). According to them, the multilingual person can be characterised as follows:

Thus, multilinguality is the inherent, intrinsic characteristic of the multilingual. We define it as an individual's store of languages at any level of proficiency, including partial competence and incomplete fluency, as well as metalinguistic awareness, learning strategies and opinions, preferences and passive or active knowledge on language, language use and language learning/acquisition. (Aronin og Ó Laoire 2004: 17-18)

Pupils with Norwegian as the primary language spoken at home (with English as a school subject), also have a store of languages on a given level; they have a metalinguistic awareness, but perhaps to a lesser degree than those pupils who speak languages other than Norwegian at home (see below); they have learning strategies, views, preferences, and both passive and active knowledge about language, its use and assimilation. Even so, we will primarily use the term multilingual as it is used for example by Hvistendahl (2009), to signify those pupils who (often or sometimes) speak a language other than Norwegian at home. We term the languages reported to speak at home as *home languages*. We will return to the term multilingual identity later in our discussion.

Metalinguistic awareness, Contrasts, Guidelines and Legal Framework

The terms metalinguistic awareness and linguistic awareness are often used interchangeably, and are defined differently in different research disciplines. Bialystok (2001) uses the word metalinguistic to cover three different terms: metalinguistic knowledge, metalinguistic ability and metalinguistic awareness. As Bialystok sees it, it is the attention of the language user which separates metalinguistic awareness, on the one hand, from metalinguistic knowledge and metalinguistic ability, on the other. This means that metalinguistic awareness, according to Bialystok, requires that the attention be focused on the relevant linguistic factors. This attention implies an active approach, rather than solely latent knowledge or skills. This attentiveness also implies that cognitively, at that moment, the short term memory is actively engaged with language, for example with the linguistic fact that the Norwegian "hund" is "dog" in English.

These terms, relating to metalinguistic awareness, are discussed both within psychology, linguistics and pedagogics. With differing purposes and different questions being posed, different sides of metalinguistic awareness are brought to light (Baker 2006, Purpura 2004, James 1999). Within psychology, there is a broad understanding of metalinguistic awareness, but as a part of cognitive processes. Research in linguistics and second language acquisition typically has narrower perspective, often concerning itself with metalanguage – the language about language – but even here the research has to some degree looked to psychology (Bialystok 2001, Bialystok 2006, Jessner 2010, Ellis 2009, Cummins 2000). Pedagogic research into metalinguistic awareness has focused mainly on

metalinguistic awareness in connection with learning or learning difficulties (Hagtvet 2002, Lyster 1995, Frost 1999, Elbro 2006).

Bialystok refers to extensive research in the area of bilingualism and metalinguistic awareness, and concludes that when compared to monolinguals, bilinguals are better able to use linguistic perspectives in order to solve a language “problem” (Bialystok 1986:499). This type of problem solving may involve activities like switching between linguistic form and content, make a metasyntactic assessment (e.g. whether a sentence is grammatical or not), and seeing semantic relationships between words (hyponymy, synonymy, etc). It is thought that the reason why bilinguals and multilinguals are potentially more linguistically aware than monolinguals, is that they routinely handle two or more languages, and as a result will see, for example, that things have different terms in different languages. In their daily lives, multilingual children will – as a matter of course and without requiring any special stimulation – look at language from the outside, handle linguistic terms and content as objects that can be talked about, scrutinised and even compared, picked apart and put back together again.

If more languages than Norwegian are brought into the class room, listened to, read and talked about, all the pupils are given the opportunity to take their first steps towards advanced metalinguistic awareness, something which teaching theories, national curricula and government papers all point to as important for pupils’ language development in Norwegian schools.

As previously mentioned, the national curriculum for Norwegian schools as set out in LK06 is ambitious when it comes to achieving a comparative perspective on language. Specific goals are: After year four, pupils are expected to be able to describe similarities and differences between various Norwegian dialects. By the end of year seven, pupils should be able to find linguistic particularities for the area they live in and be able to compare it to other dialects, as well as being able to explain some similarities and differences between spoken and written language, for the two official written versions of Norwegian (“nynorsk” and “bokmål”). After year ten, pupils should be able to describe some characteristics of main groups of spoken Norwegian, and also be able to explain how meaning and expression is kept or changed when simple stories, comics and pop song lyrics are translated into Norwegian. As we saw earlier, pupils finishing their first year of upper secondary education (11th school year) are expected to be able to engage in advanced thought processes regarding multilingualism and have a comparative perspective on languages (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2006, The Norwegian section).

The national curriculum in Norwegian for pupils from language minorities is even more ambitious with regards to achieving a comparative language perspective, and is explicitly dealt with under the heading *Language Learning*: “This main area of the curriculum concerns itself with what it means to learn a new language. It also covers language as a system, and the uses of language. A comparative perspective on the home language and Norwegian is a part of this curriculum area.” (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2007, our translation). Examples of achievement targets for the different levels in this curriculum are that pupils should be able to compare language sounds, words and terms used in the home language and in Norwegian, and that they should be able to use their own experience to identify and talk about differences and similarities between Norwegian and their own home language. In addition, they should be able to talk about experiences of how, when and where they use the different languages, and reflect on their own multilingualism and how it affects their own learning of subjects and languages. All these targets rely on doing some work on metalinguistic awareness – being able to think about languages and particularly language form – , and it requires some metalanguage – a language about language, like grammatical terminology. This curriculum has not been implemented in the Oslo schools, but the wording and content gives a pointer to the authorities’ ambition for multilingual pupils.¹

¹ The educational authorities in Oslo hold that the teaching needs of multilingual pupils are safeguarded by a separate plan, adapted to the national curriculum for teaching Norwegian. This plan covers all pupils and is described as “The Resource Folder” in the project “A Further Adapted Teaching of Norwegian”, started in 2004.

Kari Tenfjord relies on the grammatically oriented targets in the Norwegian curriculum for language minorities when she highlights a new argument for the teaching of grammar in Norwegian schools. She calls this the language comparison argument (Tenfjord 2008). The basis for this argument is that there is a need for grammatical terminology in order to be able to name differences and similarities between languages or between variations within one language. Furthermore, grammatical thinking becomes necessary in order to find linguistic patterns with the pupils. The language comparison argument is also discussed by Frøydis Hertzberg and included in her list of arguments to support the continuing teaching of grammar in schools (Hertzberg 2008).

The didactic approach we describe below, is an example of burgeoning language comparison in the class room. As we see it, this first use of language resources in the class room paves the way for further exploration of grammar at a later stage. First, one approaches language and the use of language in a given context in the class room, later one may turn to conversations about language and also naming of observed phenomena, i.e. grammatical terminology. Through our project, we show how it is possible to carry out a comparison between Norwegian and (the other) home languages of the pupils in the class, and to do it in a way which strengthens their metalinguistic awareness. We show how poems – through work with language form, rhythm, recital – can be used as a first step towards seeing systematic connections in language, i.e. towards grammatical thinking.

Method

We – one academic and four student teachers – carried out and observed a multilingual poetry project at a school in Oslo, which has many multilingual pupils. The academic took on the role of an observer through seven school days spread out over the seven week long project. She observed the pupils interact with the students as part of their daily school work. This period of seven weeks constituted these students' placement as part of the second year of their degree course in general teaching, four weeks in the autumn and three in the spring. The student teachers were teaching the pupils during all the lessons reported from herein. The poetry project extended into all the Norwegian lessons in the three week period in the spring, whereas important preparatory work was done in the autumn period. We have looked at both the academic's observations and the observations and experiences of the students in order to present a consolidated view of the whole period. Through observations, participant observations and by collecting written material, we gained insight into the social and linguistic interaction in the class, as well as a broader view of the pupils' everyday school life. Communication by use of language - spoken and written – as well as other types of behaviour, for example restlessness, signs of shyness, happiness, etc, were noted or gathered both during and immediately following the sessions. At the end of the project, we also carried out a small written evaluation in which we asked all the pupils a few questions about which part of the poetry project they had found more interesting or fun.

In the analysis of our project, it is particularly Bialystok's work on *attention* which is interesting in the context of linguistic phenomena relating to bilinguals' metalinguistic awareness, because our data to a large extent is of metalinguistic statements. Metalinguistic statements imply that the person talking – and to some degree the one listening – has his or her attention on the linguistic phenomena that are being talked about. We chose not to measure the metalinguistic awareness of the pupils in the project class with tests (about such tests, see Day and Day 1991 and Uri 2001), but rather evaluate the pupil's choice of language and their metalinguistic statements in the ordinary class room setting.

One result of the approach we have chosen, is that there are some things which we cannot say anything about. When the pupils' attention is directed towards linguistic phenomena but do not speak about them, it is not necessarily possible, using our method, to identify the pupil's cognitive processes, neither their existence nor their content, nor whether it concerns metalinguistic awareness. We therefore limit our analysis to the parts of the project where the pupils make explicit statements about language, i.e. their metalinguistic statements, and to other actions, particularly their choice of

poem, use of poetry and poetry writing. These statements and actions are the focus of our interpretations, both contextually and in light of metalinguistic awareness theories.

Our study has a qualitative design, with an inductive approach (Holme and Solvang 1996), with emphasis on observation and participant observation. The study has some features of action research, since we as participating students and an observing academic have been close to the situation we studied. By taking on different roles in the project, as described above, we have tried to benefit from this situation (open access to the project and the pupils' responses), without being too marked by the drawbacks (lack of objectivity) connected with the closeness to the research object, i.e. the project in the class. Our approach differs from what is often called action research, by being adapted to the class and teaching plans that were already in place. It was also carried out without there being any implications or expectations that our changes would necessarily be adopted as new practice by the school.

The poetry project in the class

The class in which the poetry project was carried out, here called 6x, was a year six class (ages 10-11).² Amongst the pupils in 6x, there were 16 (64%) who (also) spoke a language other than Norwegian at home with their parents. These languages were Urdu, Hindi, Panjabi, Albanian, Kurdish, Bengali, Spanish, Persian and Tamil. Several of the pupils who could speak Urdu, also spoke Panjabi at home. In addition to this, some of the pupils had knowledge of and skills in languages like German, French, English and Portuguese through close family relations.

The project school was one of the Oslo schools with a potential for being properly multi-cultural and also fully incorporating the different cultures ("felleskulturell") (Hauge 2007), but which at the time of our project was only just starting to recognise this in the practical every day work in the class room. The pupils' skills in languages other than Norwegian (and English) had not previously been focused on and brought into the teaching.

In the first part of the project, in the autumn, we had positive feed-back from the pupils on the interest we took in their language experiences and skills. One example is a situation where one of the students was in the school library with Aisha. Aisha spoke Urdu and Panjabi at home. The student had found a book in Urdu in the library, and asked Aisha what the texts in the book meant. Aisha explained with ease what the content was, and answered several, detailed questions about individual words and about the written language. She explained that she had been taught to write Urdu by her mother, and the student responded that it was such a wonderful thing that she learnt to both read and write another language. Aisha agreed that this was a good thing.

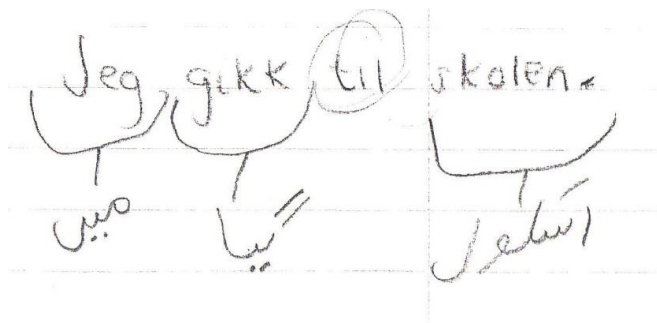
Several small conversations like the one above met with positive response from the pupils, and the students decided to place particular emphasis on the whole spectrum of the pupil's language skills where this was natural; in conversations with the pupils and while teaching in small groups. They carried out small, didactic "tests" where the language skills of the multilingual children could be held up as something positive and interesting. They chose to do this in groups, because it would be easier to encourage pupils whose first language was not Norwegian, to talk in smaller groups, rather than to the whole class. In a smaller group, it would be possible for the multilingual pupils to gain a greater understanding of the differences and similarities of the languages they knew, through a specific, guided comparison of the languages.

In the course of one such early group conversation, one of the students learned that one of the pupils, Julia, usually spoke Albanian with her family at home. One of the students said, impulsively, that it was marvellous that Julia knew several languages, that she was lucky. Julia's face lit up, and she

² We would like to thank the fabulous pupils, the teacher and the school for letting us carry out this didactic project. The school and the pupils are anonymised. Our thanks also go to the Urdu-Norwegian bilingual teacher for language help and to the staff at the school library for all their professional help.

answered: “Do you really think so?” After these conversations, Julia became particularly interested in the language groups, and often asked enthusiastically if they could go to a group room and talk some more about language. After a while, the group conversations turned to concrete contrasts in grammar and written language between Norwegian and the pupils’ home language. The students used the contrastive grammars in Hvenekilde (1990) as their starting point, after which they looked at some examples of simple syntactical difference and the use of prepositions. One example of Norwegian-Urdu from these group conversations is particularly interesting to look at.

A pupil, here called Ali, had only recently joined the class, having spent a year being taught Norwegian in an introduction class, and was still struggling to understand a lot of what was said in Norwegian in the classes. But he was an expert at Urdu. Orally, he had learnt Urdu at home, and through several years of schooling in Pakistan he had also learnt to write it. The example below shows a simple Norwegian sentence containing a prepositional phrase – *Jeg gikk til skolen* (‘I walked to school’) – and how Ali in one of the group conversations made a word-by-word translation, a kind of gloss straight underneath, written in Urdu:



Example 1: The written result of a conversation with Ali about the comparison of Norwegian and Urdu (English gloss: ‘I walked to school’)

Urdu is written from right to left, and this was one of the characteristics that had been discussed in the group prior to the translation, so that Ali and the other Urdu speakers knew that the students were aware of this difference and that they understood that the translation was meant to be done word-for-word. As both Tenfjord (2008) and Hertzberg (2008) discuss, it can be held that with a contrastive starting point, the pupils may be able to develop their metalinguistic awareness; an increased acceptance that language is an object, a “thing” that can be thought about, talked about, picked apart and put back together in certain ways, and that these ways vary from one language to another. The above example hints at the possibilities that exist when it comes to working with this kind of metalinguistic awareness. Amongst other things, it becomes clear that the preposition “til” (‘to’ in ‘I walked to school’) is not translated in the Urdu gloss. Ali explained that an Urdu word for the Norwegian “til” was not needed, because this information was already there, in the rest of the sentence. In this session, Ali showed both his oral and written Urdu skills, and his expertise was recognised through the interaction in the group.

It is possible to imagine that the contrastive approach described above could, after the initial rounds in small groups, be extended to be used in the classroom situation, in which the teacher shows the contrasts and similarities, thus enabling all pupils to see Norwegian in a contrastive perspective. This was not done in this class. Our view was that the leap was too great from the situation where there is no attention paid to any other languages but Norwegian (and English in the English classes) to a large scale comparative project in the class as a whole. We believed that at this stage, the poetry project described below would be a more suitable way of approaching grammar-contrastive aspects, both in full class and in smaller groups.

Kaldestad & Knutsen (2006) emphasise the joint action of reading and writing poetry, and they show how poetry facilitates increased metalinguistic awareness through linguistic work on sounds, rhythm and rhyme. They formulate some of the opportunities this way: common to the more conscious poetical initiatives amongst children, is that they try out in their language different alternatives to that

which is ‘right’, ‘true’ or ‘nice’.” (Kaldestad & Knutsen 2006: 15, our translation). It is just this possibility, inherent in the format of the small poem, which makes the poems so suitable for drawing out skills the children have, but which are usually hidden. Here, they have an opportunity to show these skills and to use it as a starting point for thoughts and conversations about language and form, in other words, a starting point for working on metalinguistic awareness. See Tonne and Vederhus (2011) for a more thorough analysis of the merits of using poetry in such a project.

On the first day for the spring project weeks, the pupils were told to bring a poem from home as their homework. They were also offered help from their teacher and the students to find a poem. The poem could be in Norwegian, or it could be in a different language. If it was a poem in the language spoken at home or in a language someone in the family spoke, so much the better. As a classroom activity, the poetry project was started on the third day of the spring session, when the pupils were divided into smaller groups and asked to use smell, taste and touch in order to find out which fruit or vegetable they had been given. Afterwards, they were asked to make a riddle in the form of a poem in Norwegian about this particular fruit or vegetable. The idea was that engaging a lot of different senses and give the pupils something concrete to write about, would help them get started on writing their poems. This turned out to hold water; the pupils wrote their riddles easily, of which Gunnar’s riddle below is one example:

GÅTEDIKT
Rund og Rød
Kan ikke Blø
Ekkel og Lett
Rett og Slett

(English translation:
RIDDLE POEM
Round and red,
Cannot be bled.
Yukky and light,
That must be right.)

Example 2. Gunnar’s poetry riddle (answer: tomato)

In the course of these first few days, the pupils were asked to practise reciting the poems they had brought from home, so that each of them could recite to the class. In advance, the students had agreed with some pupils, who all spoke different languages, that they would recite poems in their home language, in order to ensure that a variety of languages would be represented. It was important not to accept an initial refusal to do this. Many pupils were shy about their language skills, and the knee jerk reaction was to refuse to bring a poem from home in a language other than Norwegian. But by talking more to the students about it, they opened up and became curious about what might come out of this. A few of the pupils were at the very outset enthusiastic about finding a poem in a different language than Norwegian, on the internet, at home or in the school library. One example was Lukas, who without any further prompting brought a poem in German, German being a language he could speak a bit of since his grandfather was from Germany. Some pupils were wholly unwilling to find a poem in their home language, despite repeated attempts at mild persuasion. Ali, for example, who had shown some other pupils and the students how the sentence “I walked to school” looked in Urdu, was very clear that he did not want to use a poem in Urdu for the recital, even if he got help at school to look up different poems to choose from. When it became clear that he wouldn’t choose a poem in Urdu, he was shown some Norwegian language poems with relatively simple words and structure. He chose the poem “Epler og pærer de vokser på trærne” (‘apple and pears they grow on the trees’).

An important aspect of this didactic project, in other words, is that the teacher needs to apply careful pressure, e.g. by showing sincere interest, on the multilingual children in order to get them to come forward with their skills. Those pupils who were shy and unwilling were asked repeatedly, in different ways and offered a variety of help, if they would like to contribute something linguistic in a language that they had a relationship with. It was pointed out that such a thing would be particularly interesting. Furthermore, the pupils who seemed very confident in their bilingual role were held up as role models to those less confident. Aisha, from the library conversations described above, was one such pupil; secure in her role as Urdu writing and speaking and a Punjabi speaker as well as very proficient in both oral and written Norwegian. She inspired several others – including the girls Buket (Urdu as home language) and Alia (Kurdish as home language) – to find a poem in their own home language.

Those who didn't find a poem themselves, neither in Norwegian nor another language, were given help to find a poem on-line or in the library. Many had been given help at home, both in finding poems in Norwegian and poems in their home language. Nico, mainly of Norwegian background, had had help at home to find the poem *Kulturuke* ('Culture week') by Jan Erik Vold. Some chose poems or rhymes they already knew. Martin, also with Norwegian language background, chose the well known children's rhyme *Elle melle, deg fortelle* (comparable to the English *Ip Dip Sky Blue*). Some found a poem originally written in their home language, but used a translated version in class. Alia, with Kurdish as home language, had had help at home from her mother to find and translate a poem from Kurdish, which she recited in Norwegian. In her poetry collection – all the pupils made their own collection of poetry from the project – she included several Kurdish poems, some with translation, some only in Norwegian translation.

Then came the time set aside for the recitals. The first poems to be recited were the riddles about fruit or vegetable. They were chosen in order to give an easy start to this session, leading on to the recital of the poems the pupils had chosen. The fruit and vegetable riddles were to be read to the class by each and every one, but standing at the front of the class room together with the rest of the smell/taste/touch group, which most of the pupils didn't seem to find too challenging. As part of teaching how to recite, the pupils were reminded of how best to stand, both when it came to where to place oneself in the room and with regards to posture. They were also instructed in how to use their voices, rhythm and speed for recital of poetry.

Through the pupils' spontaneous reactions to other pupils' recitals, one could see how they experienced meeting nursery rhymes they themselves used to know, like during Martin's recital of *Elle-melle*, and how they recognised German words like *Spiel* (similar to the Norwegian "spill", meaning 'gam'), *Tanz* ("dans!" ('dance') they cried) and *lustig* ("lystig, gøy?" ('fun') they asked) from the poem Lukas read. Example 3 shows this poem:

*Ein Lied und ein Spiel
und ein Tanz auch dabei
da sind wir so lustig
als wär' es im Mai*

Example 3: Lukas brought a German poem from home

One could see and hear how the class sat open mouthed and riveted by Julia's recital of the Albanian poem, with the affricate sounds [dʒ], [tʃ] and the voiced phone [z], sounds which many found exotic. The class were as quiet as mice the first time they heard Julia read this poem:

Kam një shok
të dy tok
shkojm orë
pa mërzë
më tregon
më mëson
shumë gjera
që sidi.
Dhe ky është
kush e di
libri im
që mbaj në qji.

Kam një shok
të dy tok
shkojm orë
pa mërzë
më tregon
më mëson
shumë gjera
që sidi.

Dhe ky është
kush e di
libri im
që mbaj në qji.

I have a friend,
in both my arms.
time passes,
but we are not bored,
he explains to me,
he teaches me,
a lot of things
I cannot see.

He is, as you know
my book.
I hold him in my arms.

Example 4: Julia's poem in Albanian, about the book as a friend. Hand written by Julia to the left, transcribed to the computer (by the authors) in the middle, and then relatively directly translated into English to the right with the help of Julia's Norwegian translation (not included here).

One could see how impressed the pupils were that class mates they had known for nearly six years, suddenly showed themselves to be in possession of extensive, "secret" language skills, be it in Urdu, German, Albanian or Spanish. "Cool!" a gang of boys shouted, and sat wide eyed while Aisha read the poem she had chosen herself in Urdu. Ali, who had not wanted to choose a poem in Urdu himself, seemed taken by surprise when Aisha started reading, and glanced several times at the adults in the room, as if to see if they also understood what was happening. Then, his face dissolved into a big smile, and he was sitting jumping on his seat as Aisha finished reading the poem. Simply the fact that he could understand everything that was being said, was a new experience for him at school. In example 5 we see the poem Aisha chose to read.

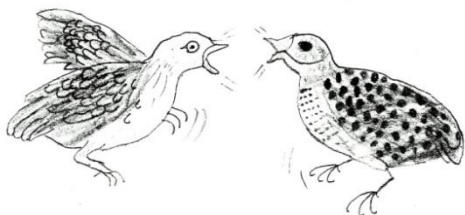
Urdu (اُردو) تیر اور بیڑ
ایک ثقایتیر ایک بیڑ
لڑنے میں پھدوون شیر
لڑنے لڑنے پھوگئی گم
ایک کی چونچ، ایک کی دم
Norok (نورک) To Fugler
Det var en gang to fugler
de krangler nesten alltid
når de sloss og sloss slo de seg
en mista nebbet, og den andre mistet halen.

Example 5:

The poem Aisha brought from home. She has made the drawing and translated the poem into idiomatic Norwegian

English gloss:

two birds
it was one time two birds
they quarrel almost always
when they fought and fought hurt they themselves,
one lost beak-the, and the other lost tail-the



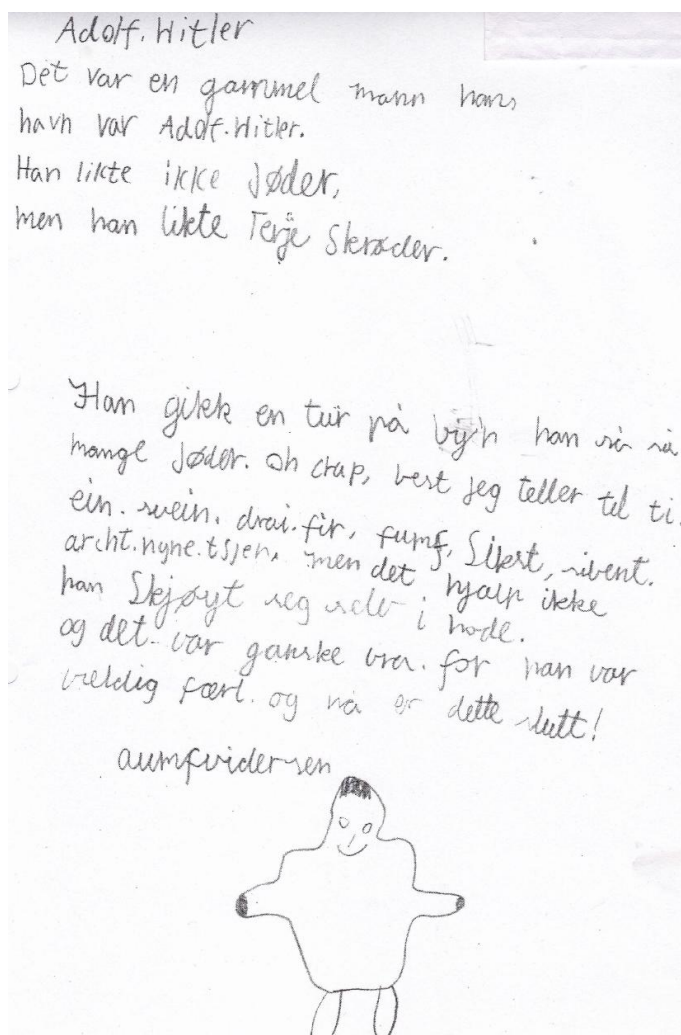
Hearing Urdu in the class room was a new experience for Ali. As for himself, he read his poem about apples and pears out loud and clear, and had positive comments from the other pupils, who had never heard him say anything on his own to the whole class. Whether or not Ali later will be more interested in using Urdu (or Panjabi) at school, he has seen that the school is interested in his language skills and experiences, and he has had the opportunity to show some of his linguistic skills in the formerly mentioned group conversations, in which he compared Norwegian to Urdu. Interestingly, one could observe that as the work with the poems was approaching its end, Ali became more and more eager to tell the students about all the languages he knew: Panjabi, Urdu, English and Norwegian.

Other pupils also showed a development when it came to using their linguistic repertoire at school. One of the girls, Farba, whose first language was Urdu, answered in the written evaluation after the project that “Urdu poem” was the poem she was most pleased with of all the poems she had worked with in the poetry project. But she was not amongst those who had chosen to perform an “Urdu poem” in class. As the project had developed, she had nevertheless wanted to include poems in Urdu in her poetry collection. She had written down these poems down from recollection, using the Latin alphabet and a mix of Norwegian and English transliteration, never having learnt to write Urdu using the Arabic alphabet. The poems she wrote down, she had learnt from her maternal grandmother.

Some days after the recital of the poems the pupils had chosen, the class was asked to add additional sound and rhythm to the non-Norwegian poems, to be performed in groups. The groups were told that they could, as an example, add sound props, make a rap, dramatise, add different sounds according to the rhythm or recite with varying speed and volume. To start with, the groups worked on getting to know one of the non-Norwegian poems from their group. The groups’ poems were Aisha’s chosen poems in Urdu, Julia’s in Albanian, a poem in Urdu which Buket had chosen and Lukas’ chosen poem in German. These pupils were happy for “their” poems to be used in this way. The pupils started by listening to the poem being re-read for some minutes, they talked about the sounds they might perhaps recognise, sounds that were unfamiliar and about words and writing systems.

The pupils were asked to listen, very carefully, and to ask for sounds and words to be repeated and also to ask about the meaning of words and sentences in the poem. All the pupils had the poem to look at on a sheet of paper. This session was a taster of a metalinguistic, contrastive approach to languages, as sounds and words in the non-Norwegian languages were highlighted and compared to Norwegian and other languages the pupils knew. Jenny, for example, who often spoke Spanish at home, recognised the word *libri* in the Albanian poem Julia had included, and suggested it might mean ‘book’, since *libro* means book in Spanish. Julia confirmed that this was correct, and the other pupils in the group praised Jenny for the sharp observation. In this group, Julia explained that the letter o is pronounced [ɔ], like the letter å in Norwegian, and that u was pronounced [u] in Albanian, like the letter o is often pronounced in Norwegian. The case of o being pronounced like [ɔ], Julia explained as “it’s a bit like with the word ‘og’ in Norwegian” (where the o is pronounced like [ɔ]), and showed both insight and overview in language matters.

When Lukas had first recited his poem in front of the class, some of the pupils had recognised words like *Spiel* and *lustig*, and suggested interpretations based on how they were similar to Norwegian words. Later, whilst adding sound props to the poems, some metalinguistic comments were made in the group which worked with this poem. Jonas, for instance, was wondering why in German they write *ä* when it is pronounced like the Norwegian *e*. A question like this – where the answer has more to do with etymology than with the current pronunciation – is in itself an observation of linguistic form, and can be a good starting point for a further and more profound conversation about language and linguistic form. Later, when the pupils were writing their own poems, Jonas chose to write a poem inspired by German, also including some German words. He relied on Lukas’ expertise in this field, amongst other things when it came to how to count to ten in German:



English gloss:
Adolf Hitler
there was an old man his
name was Adolf Hitler
he liked not Jews,
but he did like Terje Skrøder

he went a trip to town-the, he saw so
many jews. oh crap, better I count to ten
ein, svein, drai, fir, fumf, sixst, sibent.
acht, nyne, tsjen, but it helped not
he shot himself in head-the.
and that was pretty good. for he was
really bad. and now is this over!
aumfvidersen

Example 6: Jonas' poem inspired by Lukas' chosen German poem read to the class. Jonas wrote it with help from Lukas, the german expert in class. An English gloss to the right.

In Jonas' poem, we see an exploratory approach to German spelling, and his curiosity and interest in this language clearly shines through. By including German words, he underlines the message of the poem. With this poem, Jonas expressed, in his own way, the multilingual ambiance that came to characterise the class as the poetry project progressed.

The group working with Aisha's chosen poem used the Urdu version as their starting point. Aisha read the poem to the group several times. But Martin – a pupil whose first language was Norwegian – became restless. He couldn't place the information, neither the writing nor the sounds, during the recital, and vented his frustration loudly. After a while, the group suggested that Aisha could write down the poem with letters from the Latin alphabet, in other words a kind of transcription for those not versed in Urdu, which could show how the poem was meant to be read. This transcribing prompted Farba, mentioned above, to write down "her" poems even if she didn't know how to write Urdu using the Arabic alphabet. New opportunities opened up to her. Example 9 show Aisha's transcription from Urdu to the Latin alphabet, for the poem about the fighting birds (ref. example 5 above).

Ek tha titer ek bater!
larne med the dono Sher!
larte larte ho gi gom!
Ek ki chonch!
Ek ki dom!

Eksempel 7. Aisha's transcription of her chosen poem in Urdu, using letters from the Latin alphabet (see Example 5 for the Urdu version and an English gloss)

This way, Martin saw something he could more easily relate to, and he could comment on what he saw and heard. One comment was that the sound [tʃ] was written with the letters ch in *chonch*: “Now I know how you make that sound! By pressing your tongue behind your front teeth while saying it!” And it became easier to ask questions about Urdu writing: “What does that little line mean?” Now he was able to join his group in thinking out sound props and other effects they could add when the poem was performed to the class later. At Martin's request, the introduction to working with languages that many of the pupils didn't know, happened gradually, so that not everything was strange and incomprehensible all at the same time. This way, everybody had something more tangible, that they could compare to languages they knew better, be it on the level of sound, words or sentences or with regards to the written language. Hence, the pupils had, within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1991), a good basis for talking about language, having their attention directed towards linguistic phenomena (ref. Bialystok 2001); in short, a good starting point for increasing their metalinguistic awareness.

On the last day of the poetry project, the pupils could choose themselves whether they wanted to recite some poems, and also choose the poem freely from all the poems in the project. Jonas chose to perform Lukas' German poem, while Saida, a girl whose home language was Somali, chose to recite Aisha's Urdu poem. Saida used the transcription Aisha had made for the Urdu pronunciation of the poem, written in the Latin alphabet (Example 7). The pupils' curiosity about languages other than their own was plain to see. Inger Marit, a pupil whose background was primarily Norwegian, was also curious about Lukas' German poem. Even if she had not been in the group which had worked with this particular poem, she had obtained the sheet of paper with the poem and she had heard Lukas recite it in class. In a break between two lessons on this particular day, she went up to Lukas and asked: “Am I reading it correctly now?” and proceeded to read from Lukas' chosen German poem about *Spiel* and *Tanz*). It went well. Lukas nodded approvingly. Conversations about language and the use of language in the class room had become second nature to the pupils in the space of a few weeks. The pupils' language skills were part of all the class room skills, something which could be seen and heard and talked about.

Discussion

We have described a project in which the pupils are viewed as a resource, with all the linguistic ballast they bring from home. A didactic three week project in Norwegian lessons like the one described here, is not sufficient to establish and further develop good metalinguistic awareness, give a sufficiently international perspective on language and culture, or to achieve positive identity development for all the pupils. This would have to be worked on over time and on a broader base than solely in a class' Norwegian lessons. What is interesting, is how great the response to such a small project was, with regards to the inventiveness and the metalinguistic conversations amongst the pupils.

By applying Aronin and Ó Laoire's term *multilinguality* (2004), we can sum up some of the things that happened in the poetry project with regards to the pupils' multilingual identity. As previously mentioned, Aronin and Ó Laoire define *multilinguality*, or multilingual identities, as an individual's store of languages at any level of proficiency, and include metalinguistic awareness, learning

strategies and opinions, preferences and passive or active knowledge of language, language use and language acquisition. With these descriptions as our starting point, it is reasonable to suggest that the pupils of 6x have developed their multilingual identity through the activities we have outlined in this article. The multilingual pupils had an opportunity to develop their multilingual identity, since they were given a fresh look at their home language. Julia, for example, received positive feedback on knowing several languages, and was also allowed to demonstrate her linguistic allegiances and skills when working on the Albanian poem. The pupils' metalinguistic identity was also strengthened through a greater metalinguistic awareness, manifesting itself in, amongst other ways, the metalinguistic statements we have highlighted in this article. Those pupils who spoke Norwegian at home, were also given the opportunity to widen their language skills and their multilingual identity through listening to and seeing examples of writing from many languages, and through the metalinguistic conversations while the project was going on.

As mentioned earlier, academic literature often finds that bilinguals seem to have the capacity—better than monolinguals—consciously to consider linguistic perspectives (Bialystok 1986). We mentioned that the reason for this might be that they find themselves in language situations in which it is natural for the child frequently to see language from “the outside”. Based on this, it may be reasonable to believe that by creating a rich language environment, where conversations about language are facilitated, it is possible to stimulate all the pupils' linguistic awareness (see also Uri 2001). In our project, it was the case that all the pupils, both those contributing “new” language material in the classroom and those who gained insight into this material, were interested in talking about language, using linguistic details in the “new” languages as their starting point. Both pupils with home languages other than Norwegian, and pupils with Norwegian as their home language contributed in these conversations. The conversations often involved solving a language “problem”, as Bialystok discusses. In our project, this meant that the pupils actively tried to understand their peers' linguistic and cultural contributions. Some were also creative, and included data newly gained from these conversations into their own language, as is seen in Jonas' poem with German elements and with Faraba borrowing the idea of using Latin letters to write poems in Urdu.

We have been particularly interested in showing that using the pupils' home languages in the teaching can stimulate metalinguistic awareness. Bialystok has, as we have seen, used the term attention, and views the attention directed at linguistic phenomena as a prerequisite for, or as a part of, metalinguistic awareness. Through the poetry project, we have observed that the pupils, by having their attention directed at language, have been able to make observations, pose questions and point out linguistic phenomena and connections between languages. They have seen, listened and talked about the differences between sounds, words and ways of writing from one language to another, and they have been allowed to express their linguistic skills. Through this, they have been seen in a school context—by teachers and their peers—in new ways (see Tonne and Vederhus 2011 for further discussions about the opportunities for extending the pupils' *linguistic capital*).

The project has probably not enabled the pupils to describe the vocal systems in Norwegian, German or Urdu in linguistic terms, or qualified them to reflect on how verbs or prepositions can be substantially different in different languages (even if Ali was on the right track with his interesting observations in the conversations about the Urdu example (example 1)). However, the poetry project we have analysed in this article, shows that it is perfectly possible to work metalinguistically with children who have had several years of schooling but nevertheless no previous positive school experience concerning their multilinguality. What we have highlighted here is the linguistic awakening many children can experience if they are given the opportunity to hear and see properties of language in many different languages, as expressed in speech and writing. Creating room and opportunities for linguistic attention as a prerequisite for metalinguistic awareness fits well with the aims specified in LK06. The language skills necessary to achieve these milestones are already there, in the classroom.

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