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Plurilingualism and the learning of French as a foreign language in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The current article studies the competencies of plurilingual students and how these competencies are exploited in the learning of French as a Foreign Language. Adopting a translanguaging theoretical approach, we argue that learners of foreign languages who already speak at least one other language have some linguistic competencies which manifest during their learning of the French language. Through observation of learners of French at the University of Ghana Business School and analysis of their written production, we confirm that some of these plurilingual competencies in students are demonstrated in the nature of the errors identified. The paper therefore recommends that learners' existing competencies be taken into account and built upon when developing lessons for the foreign language classroom and during classroom delivery.

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Plurilingualism; competence; translanguaging; error; foreign language learning

Introduction

Observation of translanguaging

This research was motivated in part by an observation of two Ghanaian young ladies (8 and 10 years old) who are sisters and are living in Benin with their Ghanaian parents. They speak Akuapim Twi (a Ghanaian Language) at home and attend an international school where English is the language of education. They are however in a francophone country and so have acquired French as a third language with Akuapim Twi being their first language and English being their second language. We observe a conversation between the girls. This conversation drew our attention to the competencies that plurilingual speakers exhibit in the process of learning a third or foreign language. Below is a transcription of an extract of the dialogue between sisters A and B:

- A: Wo koraa, me pɛ se me bisa wo asem.
[In fact, I want to ask you a question]
- B: ɛdiɛ asem?
[What question?]
- A: Asanka, ne french ne den?
[What is French for Asanka¹?]

- B: enye /**asɛnker**?
[Isn't it /**asɛnker**?]
- A: Adɛn na wo re-ka saa?
[Why are you saying that?]
- B: Se wo French mu /riva/ ye ka no /**rivyɛ**?
[Don't we say « rivièrè » in French for the word « river » (in English)?]
- B: Se wo ye no saa ma brofoa, ye betumi aye no saa wo akuapim mu.
[If we can do that for English, we can do the same for Akuapim.]

In this conversation, we observe the passage of a transposition 'rule' from English to French which is applied to a third language, Akuapim Twi (a variant of the Akan language). It is observed that girl B undertook a linguistic transfer of the ending of a word from one language to a word in another language. Even if the reasoning is erroneous, the fact that the student was able to make this remark demonstrates that she has implicitly acquired metalinguistic competencies – in this case, interlinguistic transfers. We believe that the acquisition is implicit because the speaker seems to have not yet learnt the morphology of French. We therefore postulate that there is the presence of an instinctive or intuitive competence that allowed speaker B to operate an intercodic transfer among the three languages. We are however not certain if in saying /rivyɛ/ and /asɛnker/, student B was relying on a phonetic transformation (oral) or a written transformation based on what she has learnt in school. Moreover, this conversation also seems to confirm earlier research that bilingual or plurilingual children are more creative than monolingual children (García et al., 2006; Leikin, 2013; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002).

This observation questions the general view that metalinguistic competencies must be learnt or consciously developed specifically for each language before they can be applied as learning strategies. Very intriguing is the fact that girl B, using Twi as a basis of comparison with English, demonstrates a transfer of the *linguistic competence* of undertaking a morphological transfer from one language to the other, and even extending this to a third language. This is therefore a clear case of translanguaging due to the intentional nature in which the three languages are used.

This observation is interesting and worthy of further study and verification since its confirmation has implications for the teaching of foreign languages. We had always considered that foreign languages such as English and French are learnt in relation to one another and independently of other languages in which the learners had not developed a metalanguage. However, this exchange between the sisters led us to two major questions:

1. What are the plurilingual competencies identified in the errors of productions of students studying French as a foreign language at the University of Ghana?
2. How can these identified competencies be harnessed in the translanguaging classroom to facilitate the teaching and learning of French?

We decided to pursue this observation further by considering the productions of students learning French who have similar language repertoires of a Ghanaian language as a first language, English as their second language and language of Education, and who are learning French as a foreign language. We presuppose that students who are plurilingual make use of their existing competencies when learning a new language. In this study, we

hope to shed light on the complex nature of plurilingual learners, discover their competencies and the unique way they use these competencies in the process of learning foreign languages. To be able to answer the research questions stated and analyse this phenomenon effectively, the study will rely on the theory of translanguaging.

Language learning in the classroom versus language learning in society

Studies show that language learning in the classroom differs from language learning in society. However, these two are not to be seen as opposing activities but rather as complementary activities. Language learning in the classroom gives an opportunity to learners to participate individually or collectively, to speak, write, play a role or represent and learning is more explicit as opposed to learning in the society where language is usually just 'picked up'. Learners in the classroom listen to the facilitator and their peers, get the opportunity to read to check for pronunciation and share the views of other learners. Classroom learning is usually well-structured and there is the frequent use of repetition, which helps learners to make progress in steps. However, Dubiner (2018) posits that repetition in classroom is best achieved when implemented in a communicative and significant way. Contextualised repetition necessitates classroom activities that allow for productive (and not merely receptive) recycling of grammatical structures and vocabulary items in a relevant and meaningful context.

On the other hand, learning language in society can be termed as informal learning where a learner acquires language from various sources such as friends, native speakers, markets, listening to public conversations. This learning is not normally structured like that of a classroom which goes with specific objectives. Beyond the difference in context for language learning, some language classrooms have adopted the monolingual approach to learning where no room is made for the learner's linguistic repertoire. Indeed, in some cases, learners are even punished for using their linguistic repertoire other than the target language or the language of education. As confirmed by Hurwitz and Kambel (2020), this practice has not created the desired effect as some learners struggle with mastery of certain concepts especially when these concepts are unfamiliar to them and are not explained in a language that they understand.

Studies by Blyth (1995) indicate that even though some foreign language teachers posit that the foreign language classroom should be a target-language-only space, this is not always practised with some of the teachers using both English and French in a French language classroom. However, it seems that some learners prefer this method to being taught only in the foreign language. Indeed, the foreign language teachers who adopt the use of both languages use the languages for different classroom activities – for example, they explain grammatical concepts in English and carry out communicative tasks in French. Current research seems to favour making use of the language repertoire of the learners. With research showing better performance for students who are not cut off from the languages they already know and being taught only in the target language or in the language of education in multilingual or migratory contexts. See for example Charamba (2020) for cases from Zimbabwe or Ahadzie et al. (2015) for a case study on Ghana.

However, most of the studies on translanguaging in the classroom in the African context have focused on the use the contact between local or indigenous languages and the second language, usually the official language. The existing research also

focused mainly on primary or secondary level education. Our study focuses on trans-languaging during the learning of a foreign language, meaning that the learners already know a first language and a second language before the introduction of a foreign language. Secondly, our research is based on a study at the tertiary level as our participants are university students. We hope to demonstrate or confirm the need to leverage what learners already know when they are learning a new language, no matter their level of education and no matter whether the language they are learning is a second language or a third or nth language.

Multilingualism in Ghana

Ghana, an anglophone country in West Africa has a population of about 30.8 million inhabitants according to the Ghana Statistical Service (2021). Surrounded by three franco-phone countries: Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and the Republic of Togo, Ghana has English as its official language but has about 81 local languages (Eberhard et al., 2020). These indigenous Ghanaian languages belong largely to three different families of the Niger-Congo group, namely: Kwa, Mande and Gur (Pozdniakov, 2018). With more than a half of the population lives in urban areas (Anarfi et al., 2020), there is evidence of intense language contact which has led to many speakers speaking several languages in addition to their first language (see, e.g. Dakubu, 2009). In a social context characterised by such linguistic diversity, majority of Ghanaian speakers have competencies in at least two local languages in addition to English hence the average Ghanaian can be said to be plurilingual.

According to the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) designed by the Council of Europe (2001), plurilingual and pluricultural competence is the ability to make use of different languages for the purposes of communication and to participate in intercultural interaction. Indeed, a plurilingual person is a social agent with varying degrees of proficiency in several languages and exposure to several cultures. In this context, there is a shift in perspective both vertically and horizontally, where horizontal indicates a shift towards the use of multiple language and vertical represents the value one places on the knowledge (however partial) one has of languages as tools that can facilitate communication. This knowledge helps one know which language or languages to use in various situations and the plurilingual person is able to manipulate various languages with varied levels of mastery (Beacco, 2005; Coste et al., 2009; Piccardo & Capron Puozzo, 2015).

Among the multitude of languages spoken in the country, it is English, part of the country's colonial legacy, which has been adopted as the official language of the country and as the language of education (Bonney, 2021). This adoption of English as the official language and the language of education for a greater portion of the educational cycle is because it is considered a neutral language or a link language in a multi-ethnic and multilingual environment (Coleman, 2010). Another reason proffered for this adoption of the English language is the fact that it was the language of formal education from colonial through pre-independence to post-independence times and was adopted in continuity in the judicial, and legislative fields. English is therefore seen as a language of the educated and the elite and most people see proficiency in English as equivalent to being 'educated'. Indeed, as posited by Anyidoho and Dakubu (2008,

p. 144) 'nearly all legal and constitutional documents from colonial times to the present are silent on any possible role for Ghanaian languages, tacitly confining them to domestic, local and "traditional" non-literate domains'.

With the currently educational policy, a few local languages are selected as languages that are taught as subjects in school or that can be used as languages of education up to the third year of primary education. However, this is poorly practised and managed especially as teaching materials and reading books are developed in English and most teachers who try to put this policy into practice usually translate from English as they teach. Most learners therefore do not develop metalanguage in the local languages as they do in English or French where they are explicitly taught grammar and where they have more printed resources in these languages. We could also add to this that currently, English also plays an important role in maintaining international relations just as the indigenous languages maintain sociocultural relationships among the citizens. The French language, on the other hand also plays a major role in regional integration due to the fact that majority of the West African countries speak French. Most people who study French do so to enhance their career prospects in regional and international bodies where a knowledge of French in addition to English will be an advantage.

Contrary to English which has a colonial history in Ghana, French was adopted by the government of Ghana into the educational system before independence, by its introduction as a subject in Achimota College in 1948. Since then, efforts have been made to integrate the learning of French into the educational system (Ayi-Adzimah, 2010). This adoption had been necessitated due to the geopolitical environment or position of Ghana in the sub-region. The study of the French language in Ghana is especially important for strategic regional integration and partnerships with neighboring countries and across the globe. Competence in French can foster good relationships in promoting socio-economic and political activities in the sub-region and beyond. According to the presidential report on the new educational reform, French is a compulsory subject from Junior High School (Government of Ghana 2007, p. 15). Efforts to make French a common language in Ghana continue from regime to regime. The very Francophile President Nana Akufo-Addo declared in 2018 that his goal was 'to live, one day, in a bilingual Ghana, with French and English'. A goal that still seems a bit distant though the political will is there. This is to say that should the policy be well-crafted and adopted, French will become the second official language for Ghana. Very recently, in 2019, a directive from the Ghanaian government introduced the teaching of French as a foreign language in upper primary schools. The directive encourages the teaching of French where French teachers are available (NACCA, Ministry of Education, 2019).

Other languages such as, Spanish, Chinese, German, Swahili, Russian and Arabic are taught in some schools as foreign languages but apart from the Arabic language, the others are taught only in private primary and secondary schools or at the tertiary level. The Ghanaian population has different perceptions and attitudes with regard to the multiple languages spoken in the country. Indeed, as posited by Ahadzi et al. (2015, p. 4),

In the matter of language use in education in Ghana, attitudes are influenced by factors such as the place of the languages in the linguistic ecology and their domains of use, as well as socio-historical and cultural factors that account for the language situation. Also playing a role are the status and linguistic life history of the individuals that have the attitudes.

Also, a study by Nutakor (2020) reveals the diverse perceptions of the relevance of the French language, in particular among the Ewes of Aflao and the Akans of Ejisu. This research points out that different ethnic groups consider the learning of the French language differently and this perception depends on the immediate needs and gains that the language brings. The Akans of Ejisu do not place a high value on learning French. For this ethnic group, French has no importance in their daily life. On the other hand, the Ewe of Aflao close to the border value learning the French language for economic gain. Economic gains push Ewe parents to encourage their children to learn French.

Multilingualism in the language classroom

Available literature on multilingualism in the language classroom has changed in tone with researchers recommending a more holistic approach to the multilingual classroom and the perception of multilingual language learners as having their own unique set of competencies which may be different from that of a monolingual native speaker (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; Illman & Pietilä, 2018; Melo-Pfeifer, 2018). They posit that learners make full use of their full linguistic repertoire, and this must not be seen in a negative light by comparing their productions with that of monolingual speakers to try and find shortcomings. This competence is referred to as multicompetence by Cook (2016).

These learners possess not just linguistic competence but other forms of competence including sociolinguistic competence – e.g. knowing what language in their repertoire to use with whom – and metalinguistic knowledge. To explain further, plurilingual people possess special competencies in managing language learning and have different perceptions about the various languages that they can communicate in as demonstrated by Coste et al., (2009). There is thus a distinction between the perceived use of the various languages in their repertoire – one for social purposes and the other two for academic purposes. This could probably explain why most students in the foreign language classroom in Ghana seem to consider French just as subject that they need to study in order to pass a written exam.

According to Causa (2002, p. 46), the foreign language class is inevitably multilingual because there is language contact and this includes:

'The language(s) the learners are taught in.

The language(s) the learners understand in.

The language(s) the learners process the information and produce in.'

In other words, the contact is among the languages of teaching, that of meaning or mutual understanding and the one in which the learner uses to process ideas for oral or written production. Even though there may be overlaps of this multilingualism, one can agree to a large extent on this distribution of the different languages in the multilingual foreign language class. In the Ghanaian school system, French is largely taught in either English, French or both, depending on the level of the learners and, even sometimes, of the teachers. Most often, explanations are given in English.

It has been observed that in the Ghanaian classroom, English appears in both the written and oral productions of the students rather than the local languages

(Owu-Ewie et al., 2006). This is evident especially in our second cycle and tertiary institutions. One of the reasons why this is so may be because the students have developed metalanguage in English. Another reason could be the availability of teaching and learning materials that facilitate the transfer from English to French, rather than from the local languages. For example, it is easier to find French-English/English-French dictionaries than to find dictionaries from local languages to either French or English. The same for most language-learning materials which, when they are bilingual, are from English rather than any local language. This makes it easier for the learners to make lexical and grammatical transfers from English to French than from the local languages into French. Additionally, since they learn all the other subjects and concepts in English, they will use this same strategy when learning French. Learners' written productions that were collected for this study highlight these transfers into French showing students' reliability on English syntax and structure to learn French. This intentional manipulation of language syntax and structure is due to metalinguistic competence. As explained by Roehr and Gánem-Gutiérrez (2009, p. 166), and Ellis (2016, p. 145), metalinguistic knowledge renders explicit knowledge of the L2 held by the learners and encompasses the 'syntactic, morphological, lexical, phonological and pragmatic features of the target language'.

Metalinguistic knowledge plays a facilitative role in drawing or directing learners' focus to various types of morphosyntax to be employed in their productions (oral or written). The students whose production we are interested in, may thus make use of their reflections of how language works in both the source and the target language and transfer this knowledge when learning French. This concept is very important in language learning by people who are already bilingual or plurilingual. It is described as a learning process in which learners of a foreign language seem to rely more on the second language than on their mother tongue when acquiring a third language (Van Esch, 2003).

Our objective in this paper is to identify how through translanguaging, we can determine the plurilingual competencies identified in the errors of the written productions of students studying French as a foreign language at the University of Ghana. We also hope to discuss how these identified competencies can be put to use in the translanguaging classroom.

Theoretical underpinnings of the study

Translingualism and translanguaging

This work is grounded in both Translingualism and Translanguaging theories. We choose to use both terms because we see evidence of both terms in the activities of the learners. Translingualism – which is defined by Canagarajah (2011, p. 401) as 'the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system'. Translingualism is considered as another form of multilingualism where speakers have native competence in more than one language (Canagarajah, 2007) – for example in situations where English serves as a Lingua Franca (as is the case in most African countries colonised by the British). Indeed, as Canagarajah (2007, p. 925) puts it, 'this type of native competence (and insider status) in multiple languages is a well-known reality in many communities'. There is a distinction made between competence and proficiency with proficiency being continually developed as

the learner spends more time and has more experiences with and in the language. The competence accounts for cross-language contact and the use of hybrid linguistic codes due to their multilingualism.

Translanguaging on the other hand is defined by García (2009, p. 45) as being ‘multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds’. García’s focus is on translanguaging in the classroom, which she describes as going beyond translation and code switching. According to her, this is because it considers how bilingual students perform bilingually in classrooms where there are varied multimodal approaches. The interesting thing about translanguaging is that in the multilingual classroom, it can actually serve as a pedagogical strategy with the intentional use of different languages and manifests when two or more languages are combined in a systematic way within the same learning activity (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; Illman & Pietilä, 2018). This seems very relevant to our research where we observe that the productions of the students are multilingual but seem to follow a certain logic and are not just haphazard sentences. In a translanguaging approach, the multiple languages pupils bring into the classroom are exploited for the benefit of pupils’ learning of both language and content (Busse et al., 2020; Duarte, 2019; Yuzlu & Dikilitas, 2022). This view is confirmed by May (2013, p. 79) who describes the term translingual practice as the art of people shuttling “in and out” of languages to borrow resources from different communities to communicate meaningfully at the contact zone through strategic communicative practices.

Indeed, Lee and Canagarajah (2019, p. 4) explain their preference of the term translingual over other terms such as multicultural and multilingual as these emphasise the separation between the various cultural or linguistic elements in a person’s repertoire. For them, the term translingual is more fluid, considering the various languages in a speaker’s repertoire ‘in synergy’ and ‘generating new forms and meaning in contact’. This is demonstrated in several ways for example when a language learner thinks of or conceptualises an assignment in one language but writes it in another language. It is evident from our classroom observations and the written production exercise that the students use translanguaging a lot in the foreign language classroom with an aim to communicate as effectively as possible based on their proficiency level in the target language. In the following section, we present the profile of our study participants.

Methodology

The study was conducted at the University of Ghana. The population of our study was made up of first-year Business School students learning Business French (French for Specific Purposes). These students were aged between 17 and 19 years and numbered 322 in total. The class was divided into two groups: beginners and intermediate with 182 students belonging to the beginners’ class and 140 belonging to the intermediate class. The beginners’ class comprises students who have never studied French and those who studied French up to the Junior High School and therefore have low competence in the language. The intermediate class is made up of students who studied French as an elective course in the Senior High School and therefore have mastered the basic notions in French. Out of a population of 322 students, a representative sample of the productions of 70 students was selected at random (from both beginners and intermediate levels) for our analysis. It must be noted that for this kind of research which did not involve

Table 1. Number of students offering languages at the UGBS.

Year	French	Chinese	Spanish
2020	990	209	08
2021	1860	157	06
2022	2340	194	06

direct communication with any students, there was therefore no need for informed consent. Respecting confidentiality was also assured because these productions were chosen from the students' end-of-semester examination scripts for the 2016/2017 academic year with the consent of the Lecturer in charge. The examination scripts were already anonymised as students' examinations scripts are identified by index numbers and not by names. This anonymity is maintained throughout the study.

We chose to study their responses to a section of the examination in which they were asked to present their profession, and the day-to-day activities of the bank in which they work. We carried out a careful analysis of the written productions of these students of French, using a prepared grid to enable us to classify the different kinds of errors that were present and identifying those which pointed to strategies that indicated the use of their plurilingual competencies, including the use of their various linguistic repertoires. The data gathered was qualitatively analysed using the linguistic taxonomy described by Burt et al. (1982) with an emphasis on how the plurilingual students exploit their competencies in relation to the learning of French.

The University of Ghana Business School (UGBS) is chosen as our point of interest since the courses offered at the school are non-linguistic disciplines and languages such as French, Chinese, and Spanish are taught in the first year as required examinable subjects. As a matter of fact, one cannot graduate without obtaining a pass in the language courses. These language courses have been part of the curriculum for over 15 years and students used to have the choice between French and the other languages on offer (Chinese or Spanish). However, over the years, the interest in French has been so tremendous. For most students, French is the obvious choice because it is a foreign language most of them would have already been exposed to in primary school but also because of its perceived economic and political relevance since it is the language used by sub-regional, regional and international organs as well as the major language of communication for Ghana's immediate neighbouring countries. Recent students' population for French in UGBS has increased more than two-fold between 2020 and 2022 with numbers moving from 990 in 2020 to 1860 in 2021 and 2340 in 2022 whereas the numbers for Chinese and Spanish remain relatively stable with moderate interest in Chinese and very little interest in Spanish. This can be observed from [Table 1](#).

It must be specified that even though these language courses are housed in the Business school, instructors are drawn from the Departments of French and Modern Languages of the University through a private arrangement.

Profile of the study participants

The participants of our study are students of the University of Ghana Business School offering non-linguistic disciplines. In other words, they offer courses like Accounting, Administration, Marketing, Banking and Finance. These students learnt their respective

first languages at home or in a family. In addition to this, most of the students for this study speak variations of the Akan language, which is the most widely spoken language in Ghana. However, English is the medium of instruction in school at least from the fourth year of primary school. The French language on the other hand is a subject taught in the Business School during first year for two semesters. Some of these students already have a basic knowledge in French as it is taught as an optional course in the basic schools. Due to their plurilingual nature and the fact that they operate in multilingual communities, these students change from one language to the other based on the communication situation and based on the people they are speaking with. This means they speak their mother tongue with their parents and others who share this language on various occasions, other Ghanaian languages in communities and circles where there are spoken; they speak English with their teachers and classmates and French in class during French lessons and perhaps outside with friend or in a francophone environment if necessary. However, they very rarely find themselves in a francophone environment where they have to communicate in French.

These characteristics demonstrate that the students are plurilingual. Firstly, they live in a multilingual society with many languages being spoken within their communities. Secondly, a number of them speak a first language which is different from other languages within the same territory. Thirdly, they communicate using English, the country's official language – which is a second language to most of them – and other languages including variants of Akan which is a lingua franca in Ghana (the most widely-spoken local language). Finally, they also speak French which they are learning as a foreign language.

During our observation in class in Business School, Legon, we observed that the written and oral productions of students, even when they were incorrect, did not seem haphazard. Our attention was drawn to the fact that these beginner learners were exhibiting plurilingual competencies in the process of learning a third or foreign language. It is this reason that pushed us to seek out the plurilingual competencies identified in the errors of productions of students, who engage in translanguaging in the French as a foreign language classroom and seek out how their competencies can be mobilised by both teachers and learners to promote learning of French at the University of Ghana Business School?

Findings, analysis and discussion

The analysis presented in this section shows that students with at least two languages demonstrate communication strategies based on their language repertoire and how these competencies are employed in learning a third language (French in this context). This corroborates existing research which suggests that when an individual develops a degree of competence in two or more languages s/he also develops higher levels of communicative sensitivity, creative thinking and metalinguistic awareness which facilitate the acquisition of language (Jessner, 2008; Oliveira & Anca, 2009).

We obtained the written production of students through an exercise in which they were asked to write a 200-word essay describing their day-to-day activities as banking professionals. We were interested in their written production rather than oral production since written production is usually less spontaneous and learners have more time to craft what they want to communicate as opposed to oral production. Of the over 300 scripts

received, we randomly selected 70 from which we selected errors in the written production. These errors were categorised and analysed. We made the kind of errors produced by the students as a main focus as previous studies suggest that errors made by language learners are actually an indication that learning is taking place (See for example Kaweera, 2013) who indicate that majority of errors made by second language learners are developmental errors and overgeneralisation rather than interference errors and Spada and Lightbown (2019), who indicate that second language learners end up restructuring based on their first language.

These errors made by students in French reveal the unconscious creative ability of learners which leads us to agree with the notion of generative grammar with limited sense as underlined by the creative constructive hypothesis of Dulay and Burt (1974), Dulay et al., (1982), and Krashen (1981, 1982). However, during this process, learners can produce errors that they did not use to make. These errors are usually corrected over time. This assertion is complemented by Erdoğan (2014), who indicates that errors are important as they provide feedback on the teaching and learning process. They reiterate the importance of teachers identifying and describing the errors made from a linguistic point of view but also from a psychological point of view. This means understanding not only the what but also the why. It is only then that correction can be effective and help the learners' progress or improve. We also hoped to find evidence of students leveraging their competencies in Ghanaian languages and English in learning French. However, the data we gathered indicates reliance mainly on the English language and little evidence of overt reliance on the Ghanaian languages in their repertoire. This could be due to similarities between English and French languages in terms of sentence structure, lexical similarities, alphabets, etc. (De Korchagina, 2019).

With a critical study of the students' written productions, we came across a considerable number of expressions which were largely influenced by the complexity of their plurilingual competencies, and which were manifested through translanguaging. These expressions were identified and classified according to various error types and analysed. The analysis of their written corpus enabled us to follow in context how plurilingual learners use previous knowledge and experience in their previously acquired languages to communicate in their target language. Below are some of the productions of the learners and the conclusions we can draw about their plurilingual competencies. It is worth noting that during the translanguaging of the students in their written productions, four different plurilingual competencies were identified. These include linguistic competencies, sociolinguistic competencies, communicative competencies, and metalinguistic competencies.

Linguistic competencies

Burt et al.'s (1982) description of linguistic taxonomies in terms of the difference between the learner's utterance and the reconstructed version were used to classify the identified errors based on the linguistic components. These include orthographical errors, morphological errors and lexical, syntactic errors, interlinguistic errors and errors related to codeswitching (see Table 2).

Students' strategies in their written productions reveal their ability to exploit their language repertoire in their written exercise, mainly making use of the structure of the

Table 2. Types of errors produced by students.

Linguistic components of errors	Examples of productions
Orthographical errors	1. *Les gens viennent <i>depositer</i> et retirer leurs argents. (People come to deposit and withdraw their money)
Morphological and lexical errors	2. *Les gens qui ont <i>withdrawn</i> de l'argent. 3. *Aussi je donne <i>accounts</i> à la directrice. 4. *La banque est un lieu ou les gens laissent leurs <i>valuables</i> . 5. *Je dois vérifier que les choses sont en course. 6. *Voilà, cet homme prend et donne l'argent; il s'appelle <i>cashier</i> . 7. *Je m'appelle Jean Moreno, votre « host » pour aujourd'hui. 8. *La caissière écrit dans un cahier appelle « ledger ».
Syntactic errors	9. *Il fait <i>securité travail dans</i> la banque. 10. *De 8 h <i>dans</i> le matin à 5 heures <i>dans</i> le soir. 11. *Nous avons <i>personelle</i> qui <i>parler</i> avec les <i>customèrs</i> . 12. *J'ai petits « meetings » ici et là.
Interlinguistic errors	13. *Je <i>fais sure</i> les comptes à <i>balancé</i> . (I make sure the accounts are balanced) 14. *Pour mon <i>jour à jour activités</i> , je <i>généralement directe</i> l'argent de cette banque. (For my day to day activities, I generally manage this bank's money)
Codeswitching	15. *Nous vendons aussi « bonds » et « treasury bills ». 16. *Les personnes restent pour « balancing of accounts ». 17. *Nos <i>customers</i> achètent « shares ».

English language. From the few examples in Table 2 above, there is an attempt by students to combine French and English words in the same order, assuming these carry out the same meaning irrespective of the differences in structure. Despite the errors, it is clear that the students make use of translanguaging as a strategy. They are intentional in their writing to show an intention to communicate and that their errors are not just haphazard. Usually, since their teachers of French also speak English, they understand what message the students are trying to convey.

We identify several manifestations of translanguaging in these productions which reveal varied forms of linguistic competence. Firstly, we have students applying some morphological rules to English words to turn them into French words as demonstrated in example 1 on the table. The 'er' is added to the English verb *deposit* to make it an ER verb in French. Even though the word *depositer* in that sentence reveals a spelling error and does not exist in French, it displays competence resulting from the influence of grammatical rules in the usage of French verbs. In example 2, the writer tries to respect the tense structure (present perfect) in French and this is demonstrated with the conjugated form of the auxiliary 'avoir' in French, and the past participle of 'withdraw' in English (*Les gens qui ont *withdrawn* de l'argent). These two examples (1 and 2) clearly indicate not only students' ability to use the linguistic repertoires but also expose the intriguing creativity in the manner the learners leverage these plurilingual competencies on a new language they are learning. We also find cases of transliteration, where the students do a literal syntactic translation from English to French (examples 8–11). We see that the sentence order is just as in English even though the French may not write in that way as in examples 9 and 10.

Sociolinguistic competencies

Sociolinguistic competencies have also been displayed in the students' productions as one of the plurilingual competencies in French as a foreign language class. From examples 12–

17 in Table 1 above, it is obvious that the learners are aware that they are in a French language class and that their productions must be in French. However, since they cannot readily find the French term to use or because they have a lexical deficit, they introduce an English term and place it in inverted commas to differentiate it from the rest of the sentence, which is in French as in **La caissière écrit dans un cahier appelle « ledger »*. This introduction of English words in the inverted commas or the blended use of English and French in their written productions suggests learners' attempt to resort to code-switching as part of their sociolinguistic competence strategies. It is a strategy learners deploy in communicating with others knowing very well this might not conform to the general norms and other social situations that the language used presents.

Markee (2015) points out that sociolinguistic competence is mediated action by a constellation of factors, including language learners' histories, their knowledge of variable L2 forms and their meaningful potential, and the forms of support made available to them in interaction. This suggests that this action emerges in a real and concrete communication. Sociolinguistic competence can also be a result of the intra-language variation as well as inter-language factor. In their productions, the English language is found to have a significant relationship with the sociolinguistic competence of our learners. For instance, **Il fait sécurité travail dans la banque'*, can be traced to the social norm usage in English where we say 'security work' where 'security' precedes 'work' contrary to the reverse in French, where "le travail de sécurité". These errors reveal to us that in learning French, the students draw a lot on the syntax and vocabulary of English and tend to also overgeneralise certain rules. For situations like this, it is important that the French language teacher, who also understands English guides learners to find vocabulary specific to the domain and the equivalence in the source and target languages.

Communicative competencies

The analysis of the productions indicates that communicative competencies were deployed by the learners. These are illustrated in the following examples:

*Voilà, cet homme prend et donne l'argent; il s'appelle cashier.

9. *Il fait sécurité travail dans la banque.

10. *De 8 h dans le matin à 5 heures dans le soir.

11. *Nous avons personnel qui parler avec les customèrs.

In these examples, learners' message can be deduced despite the morphosyntactic and lexical deficits in their productions. Though the appropriate vocabulary and expressions were not used, one can infer understanding from these various examples especially if the teacher has the same language repertoire – in this case, English as a source language. These productions seemed highly motivated by interlinguistic interference from the English language. When we consider example 10, it is clear that the writer reasoned in English and literally translated 'from 8 in the morning to 5 in the evening' into French, without realising the difference in syntactic structure. This comes to confirm that learners who have two or three languages before learning a third one and in this case French as a foreign language usually explore various plurilingual competencies in their oral and

written productions. This is also demonstrated by the students who even chose to insert English words but put them in inverted commas (Examples 12, 15, 16 and 17):

12. *J'ai petits « meetings » ici et là.
15. *Nous vendons aussi « bonds » et « treasury bills ».
16. *Les personnes restent pour « balancing of accounts ».
17. *Nos customers achètent « shares ».

This act seems to suggest that the students are aware that the words they are using are borrowed from English and are not normally the same words that are used in French. However, because of their desire to communicate meaningfully, they use the inverted commas so that the teacher is aware that it is not just a 'mistake' but an intention to communicate. They believe that the teacher will understand what they are trying to communicate because they have a shared code which is English, but more importantly, specialised vocabulary used in the business sector.

Metalinguistic competencies

Metalanguage as stated earlier, refers to how a learner mostly uses his/her general understanding of one language to describe another language. As Ortega and Piccardo (2018) observe, recourse to alternate forms in school situations is also often observed, and switching to another language in the classroom can indicate appeals for help, indications of a learning difficulty, or strategic use of language resources to maintain communication at all costs. In this process, learners' combination or mixture of languages may be considered as errors and perhaps penalised by teachers who might not have knowledge on plurilingual pedagogy. However, Tagliante (2001) posits that errors indicate that the learner is using his or her interlanguage and that the system is being put in place. They represent transitory linguistic competencies which correspond, at a point in time, to a state between 'incorrect' statements and right expression. To ascertain the role and importance of metalanguage in advancing learners' L2 or L3 understanding, a careful study was done on their written corpus with reference to Swain et al.'s 'Languaging types framework' (2009) which consists of language units (LU). These include inference-integration, inference-elaboration and inference-hypothesis formation. Learners use inference-integration, a cross-reference of information of previous knowledge to think about and understand the structure of the target language. This is evident in example 1 (*Les gens viennent déposer et retirer leurs argents*) as the learner tried to transform or convert 'deposit' from English to fit into the conjugation rule that says that when two verbs follow each other, the first one is conjugated and the other is kept in infinitive form. This integration is again illustrated in example 17 where 'customèrs' was also framed as a French word in the sentence since it was not placed in any inverted commas but had the *accent grave* placed on it to give the [ɛ̃] sound. This demonstrates that learners carry out cognitive operations during translanguaging and that even though their productions may contain errors, they have grasped certain aspects of the grammar and vocabulary usage of the French language – though imperfectly and they are trying to fit this into their existing repertoire the best way that they know how.

Harnessing plurilingual competencies in the foreign language classroom

All these plurilingual competencies used by learners in their various productions demonstrate that students draw on their other languages, especially English to help them demonstrate their knowledge and competence in French, for example when they engage in francisation of English words or when they borrow words directly from English into their French productions. These strategies can be explored in the teaching and learning of a new or foreign language as in the study of French in Ghana. A foreign language cannot be learnt in a vacuum, the learner will rely on the concepts already acquired in the languages he or she already knows in learning the new language and this is demonstrated through the translanguaging activities in the productions of the students. Teachers can therefore harness these competencies to promote foreign language learning, since one learns from the known to the unknown. For instance, the student who produced the extract in example 10 can be guided to discover the morphosyntactic structure in French which may clearly not be the same as in English. Knowing the linguistic repertoire of the learners will help the teacher to better understand and anticipate the strategies employed by the learners when they are faced with difficulties in their foreign language learning.

Providing the learners with the appropriate rules of speaking and writing and raise their sociolinguistics awareness thus getting to learn the socio-cultural differences across languages can be one of the strategies in the plurilingual classroom learning. Putting learners into groups with materials presenting various social real-life situations with teacher assistance can help learners get involved in interactions. This will provide opportunity for autocorrection or peer learning where some of these errors can amend. By acknowledging and encouraging plurilingualism in the language classroom, teachers will guide learners in the right direction in the process of learning the target language in a relevant way given attention to its various components.

We agree with Fielding (2016) and Galante et al. (2020) who observed that learners using their prior knowledge of language or dialects in plurilingual classroom help make them feel more confident and motivated in their learning process. When the exploration of their prior languages is accepted, the learners feel bold in participating in learning. We must indicate that in the written productions of the students, there was no evidence, on the morphosyntactic and lexical levels, of interference from the local languages but the data we collected seemed to confirm the psychotypology theory of students relying on one 'external' language to learn another language. However, we do think that there may be other reasons for this apparent absence of the L1 from their productions. The first reason may be the fact that the production was written rather than oral. It is our observation that students treat writing as 'serious stuff' and whereas they may more freely express themselves orally; there is much more restraint when writing as it is considered 'official'. Secondly, the nature of the exercise in a business French class is such that the students have to deal with specialised or technical jargon and concepts, for which they may not have acquired the linguistic equivalence in their local languages.

Limitations of the study

This study focused only on the written productions of students offering courses in non-linguistic disciplines. However, we believe that comparing their written production with

their oral production could have provided some insights into whether the observations made concerning their translanguaging could be generalised across modes of production or whether there were differences based on their oral or written communication. This comparative perspective could be explored in future research.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore translanguaging in the written production of students in the French as a foreign language classroom in the University of Ghana. Foreign language learning is indeed a complex process, and it is not always easy to distinguish among the various constituting factors. Our first observation on two Ghanaian learners in Benin indicates that they were able to make connections between French and Akwapim twi in spite of the structural and lexical differences. A detailed study was conducted on the written productions of students of French at the Business to understand the mechanisms that come into play during the learning of a new language by a plurilingual learner. It is evident from the data collected and analysed that plurilingual learners of French as a Foreign Language have certain competencies that can be harnessed in the classroom to facilitate teaching and learning. These include linguistic competencies, sociolinguistic competencies, communicative and metalinguistic competencies. These competencies seem to have been based primarily on only their competencies in the English language for which they have a developed metalanguage, rather than on the local languages that they speak but which are hardly written and read. This could be because they cognitively perceive English as a « classroom » language and therefore the most suitable language to use when learning any subject or writing examination. We are of the view that these competencies serve as a premise through which French language learning can be promoted among the learners if they are well exploited.

We therefore propose that teachers accept the plurilingualism in their classroom language teaching. The language teachers can make full use of the noticing hypothesis includes output and input enhancement with an emphasis being placed on form – for example, underlining or bolding certain words or expressions that could indicate a dependency on previously-acquired language or culture. This is because plurilingual pedagogy can accept and promote partial competencies. Acceptance of plurilingual competencies in class gives more confidence to learners who later come to terms with the appropriate usage of the target language. Teachers can encourage learners to think about expressions in English or their L1 and make comparison with French, the target language. Seeing plurilingual competencies as a help and not an obstacle in classroom, teachers can take advantage of these to help bring the learner to understand and appreciate the similarities that exist in their previous languages and the target language and in this case French. We therefore tend to agree with De Jong and Freeman (2010) that teachers can also teach students to transfer linguistic knowledge from one language to another and that translanguaging in the multilingual classroom should be encouraged especially as this research and others such as that of Yevudey (2014, p. 260), confirm the fact that ‘translanguaging in the classroom provides a “fertile” platform to harness learners’ linguistic repertoires flexibly to achieve and maximize learning and teaching goals’. Translanguaging therefore presents opportunities, not just for the language teacher but also for the language learners and if these are fully exploited, there is likely to be faster and easier

mastery of the target language. Indeed, the insights from this study highlight the value and need to continue exploring the creative ways in which plurilingual students and teachers can benefit from the myriad of resources they have as individuals and members of communities.

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