

2015 CEL/ELC Conference, Freie Universität Berlin

**The issues of multilingualism for the
quality of higher education and
research in the context of
internationalisation**

MEMO

Science and communication

- Science is created and transmitted in and through communication,
- which means that thought needs to be given to the various forms of communication.
- Today, the construction and transmission of knowledge is based on a growing monolingualism,
- with English as the *lingua franca/lingua academica* regarded as a condition of any knowledge that seeks to be universal.

Transparency of languages and universality of the modes of communication

- Languages are seen as mere vehicles in the service of ideas and discoveries.
- Although English has facilitated extraordinary advances in knowledge, it can also eventually lead to the impoverishment of knowledge.
- There are risks in developing a monoculture of knowledge and science in so far as languages are involved in shaping knowledge.

Multilingualism as an antidote to the destruction of different academic scientific cultures

- Multilingualism guarantees the plurality of perspectives, and therefore the density (richness, thickness) and the quality of knowledge.

Internationalisation and diversity of scientific cultures

To meet the dual requirement of the internationalisation of higher education and research while promoting the diversity of scientific cultures,

- it is necessary to strike the right balance between English and other languages in higher education and research,
- in order to optimise the processes of the construction and transmission of knowledge and competences.

« Mediation »

- In order to understand the importance of language and communication in the construction and transmission of scientific knowledge and competences,
- it is fundamentally necessary to be aware of the role of 'mediation' played by language and communication ('mediation' in the sense of conceptual framework and model of action).

- But while today's language specialists are by and large aware of the linguistic implications of cognitive processes, this is not the case, or only rarely the case, for teachers and researchers in other disciplinary fields.
- Several projects currently underway invite language specialists to conduct discussions with their students about the relationship between linguistic, conceptual and communicative diversities and the diversity of academic cultures.

Languages are becoming everyone's business...

- Teachers of other disciplines, like language teachers, should understand the **MEANING**, the interest and the added value of this integration for the construction and transmission of knowledge and competences.

Campaign of awareness raising on the « mediation » of knowledge and skills by language and communication

- to lead our colleagues in other disciplines (in the hard sciences as well as the human and social sciences)
- to realise the role of ‘mediation’ played by language and communication, in order that they too can develop a reflective attitude towards the instrument they use every day in the practice of teaching.

A specific approach

- Not CLIL, but an approach that matches its specific requirements and conditions, especially in terms of reflective practices and problem-based learning
- At the present time, a large array of multilingual strategies is available for higher education:
 - Programmes including modules in English and modules in other languages;
 - Classes in a local or regional language with reading material in English;
 - Classes taught in English where students can use their own languages;
 - Classes where code-switching is permitted between English and local or regional languages;
 - Translations into the local language;
 - Classes delivered in several languages, where they may alternate either at the “meso” level of activities or at the “micro” level of linguistic structures.

Working group / Reference group

- bringing together language specialists and specialists in other disciplines who are leading figures in the academic world;
- drawing on the findings of research in recent years on the issues of multilingualism for the construction and transmission of knowledge and skills.

Language and communication as instruments of mediation

- **Symbolic mediation**, envisaged as a model of reality and as a conceptual or cognitive framework that filters our view of the world.
- **'Action-mediation'**, acting as a model for actions, which configures our modes of negotiating and monitoring our relationship with other people and with the world.

Multilingualism and mediation

Multilingualism serves:

- on the one hand to **reveal** this dual function of mediation, in so far as it provokes a ‘shock’ between several ways of interpreting reality through language and communication,
- and on the other hand to **reinforce** mediation, in so far as it adds to conceptualisation and optimises communication (cognitive and communicative benefits).

Cognitive and communicative benefits of multilingualism

Cognitive benefits

- greater conceptual depth,
- ‘defamiliarisation’ of concepts,
- unexpected connections between them, and
- a greater diversity in modes of access to concepts.

New glasses on the world

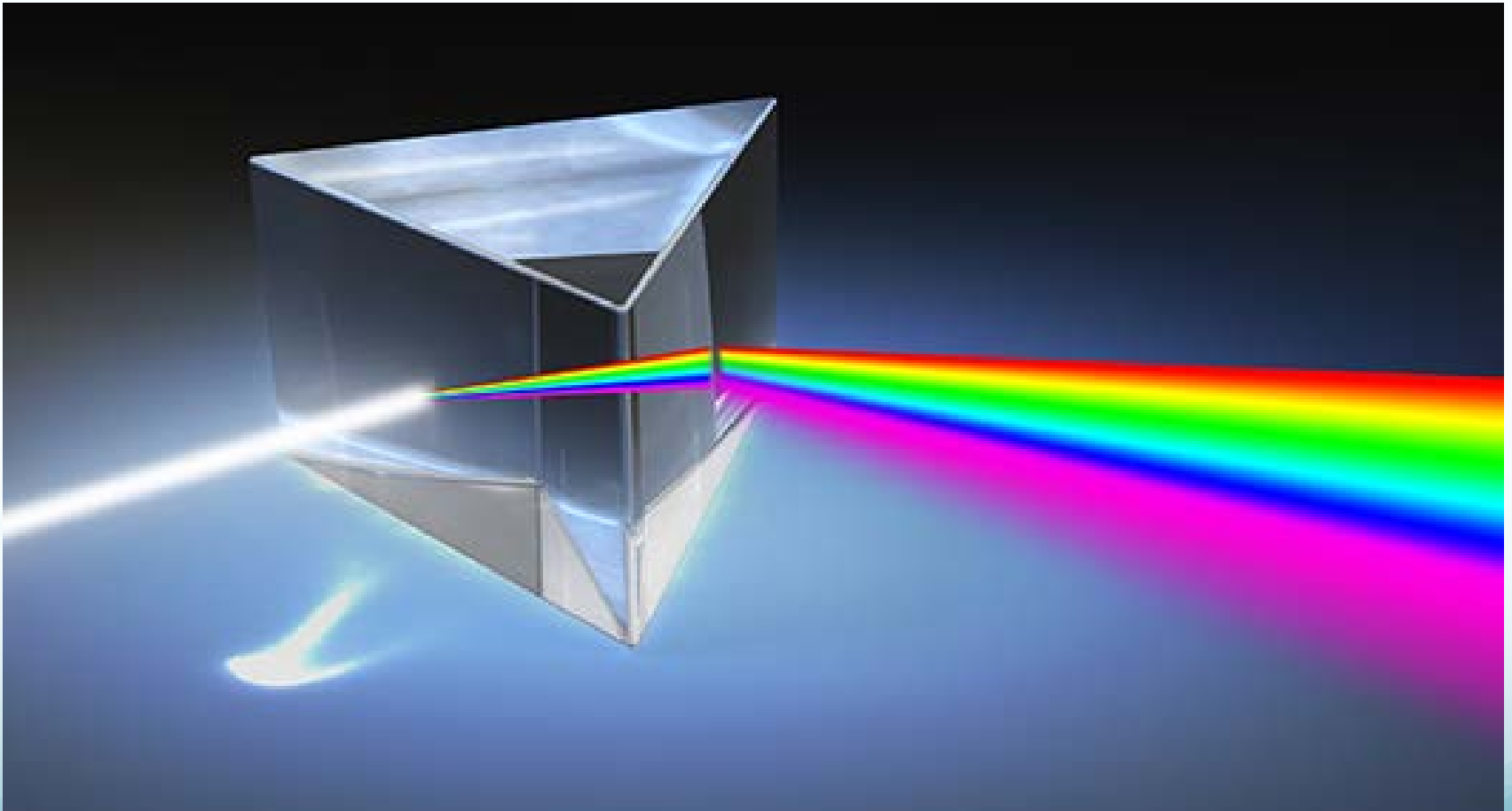


Communicative benefits

Influence of multilingualism:

- on modes of communication,
- on protocols of negotiation and problem solving, and
- on action monitoring and decision-making.

Prism on modes of communication



Universality / Uniformity

In cognitive and communicative terms

- multilingualism thus appears as the guarantor of the **universality** of knowledge and of scientific practice (based on diversity arising from a logic of reasoning),
- against the risk of **uniformity** (aiming at a minimalist standardisation arising from a logic of production).

Surfing or decoding complexity

Les mondes de la connaissance
sont multiples. On peut surfer
entre ces mondes et les interroger
dans leur diversité.



Le plurilinguisme manifeste la
richesse de ces mondes et décode
leur complexité.

Illustration by Francesco de Comitè