

Rethinking Multilingualism: Challenges and Opportunities

Session five

Languages in the Creation/Production, Transfer, and Application of Knowledge

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Introduction

- Knowledge is created/produced, transferred and applied through communication
- This implies that the choice between different forms of communication, the choice of language(s), need to be carefully examined
- An increasing share of scientific and academic communication is monolingual, English as a *lingua franca (lingua academica)* being regarded as a condition for the universality of knowledge

- No doubt that English as a *lingua franca* facilitates scientific communication in a globalised world
- In the hard sciences, English is almost the only medium of scientific communication
- In the humanities and social sciences, too, English is increasingly being used as a medium of scientific communication
- With the exception of studies dealing with individual languages, a majority of publications and conference presentations in the field of linguistics are now in English

- Major national funding organisations in Europe expect researchers to publish project outcomes in international scientific journals, which normally means: in English
- The notion of excellence is closely linked to international comparison and competition – in other words, international rankings

Problems

- International against national, regional and local
- Discrepance between disciplines
- Excellence in one language only?
- Short term sciences against long term sciences
- Scientific monoculture, « mac'donaldisation » of science?

International against regional

- International teams and consortia tend to address research questions that deal with universal or transnational phenomena
- However, there is and always will be a need for research addressing questions that have a clear local, regional or national dimension. The scope of research clearly influences the incentive to publish internationally

Discrepancy between disciplines

- This can affect 'national' disciplines, which may not receive fair and equal treatment in comparison with 'global disciplines'
- Of course, an alternative view can argue that scientific-scholarly research work, regardless of discipline, should produce universal knowledge and/or explain phenomena or concepts on the basis of general laws or principles – and thus step across a purely local or national viewpoint

Short terms vs long terms sciences

- While in the hard sciences, research outcomes increasingly rapidly get dated, this is not the case in the humanities
- Humanities researchers will continue to deal with texts that were written ages ago – in a language other than English

Scientific monoculture

- Why an excellent scholar should publish his outstanding monographs – such as his two-volume Schiller biography – in English?
- Should his outstanding research not be regarded as excellent, simply because he did not publish in English?
- Excellent research = international research = published in English?
- Condition of « excellence » = to be monolingual?

Uniformity or universality of science?

- While the use of English has undoubtedly facilitated scientific exchange, it could also impoverish knowledge if its use leads to scientific monoculture and standardised patterns of thinking
- Uniformity = standardization (logique de la production)
- Universality = diversity (logique de la raison)
- Universality or uniformity of science?

- Standardization of science rests on the assumption that language is transparent, functioning as a neutral vehicle to express ideas and share discoveries
- Multilingualism can be the obvious antidote to the erosion of scientific cultures. It affords a plurality of perspectives and ensures that objects and phenomena are seen through different prisms
- Monolingualism is a condition for uniformity of science
- Multilingualism is a condition for universality of knowledge

Transmission and application of knowledge.

- Research findings can be beneficial to new or improved products and services, and can provide orientation to policy-makers and decision-makers
- But, if we want to get the message across, we have to use a language that is accepted and readily understood by our target groups
- And this language will in many cases not be English

Teaching and teacher education

- Can we imagine that in future, all teaching in the hard sciences at BA level and in schools will be in English?
- Even new “excellent” knowledge, published in English language journals, will have to be made available in other languages. And this is a tremendous challenge for our researchers
- Multilingualism is a condition for transmission of knowledge
- Multilingualism is a condition to fill the growing gap between science and society

Scientific communication competence

- In a knowledge society, one of the big issues is therefore scientific communicative competence
- It was certainly not by accident that in the Bologna process special emphasis was placed on the importance of communication.(cf Dublin Descriptors)
- The issue is whether scientists and scholars can adequately communicate the outcomes of their research to the academic community and to other stakeholders

- In Bologna, question as to which language was to be used for communication was not raised
- English is seen as an evidence

The challenges

- Higher education and scientific institutions are today caught between two contradictory forces: they have on the one hand to compete in the global arena and on the other hand to foster their local and specific cultures

They have to find

- a right balance between internalisation and localisation,
- a right balance between **progressivity**, efficiency, immediacy and simplicity and **intersubjectivity**, fairness, participation, collaboration and decoding of complexity
- In linguistic terms, this implies to combine the different objectives by promoting English without neglecting other languages

A multilingual competence

- How can we assure quality and richness of knowledge in this « espace de tension » between the use of English as a lingua franca and the use of other languages?
- Quality of knowledge implies quality of languages
- Richness of knowledge implies diversity of languages
- Quality and richness through a multilingual competence

A « toolkit » for higher education and science

- A « *toolkit* » included high level competence in L1 and in English, and partial competences in other languages
- A multilingual competence not conceived as an additive competence but as an integrative competence
- where English and other languages are not in competition but in complementarity and continuity
- A new « contract » between English and other languages

Towards a « thick standardization »

« thick standardization » (results in one target language and scientific culture but with « hidden » strata from other languages and scientific cultures)



Thank you!