

***Lingua, lingua franca, lingua academica :
are European universities language happy ?***

In the past two decades, European universities have developed a great number of new programmes, courses and projects; the terms of mission and vision have appeared in many strategic plans together with a new approach to quality and quality assurance.

The European University Association (EUA) has run for ten years now a programme entitled: *Institutional Evaluation Programme* (IEP). It is meant to help higher education institutions define their development through action plans and specific policies. More than 250 universities have been visited and the reports published offer a precious light on the orientations and new trends in the European higher education systems. The reports and recommendations are published and can be consulted on the EUA website (see: References below).

Among the many issues discussed with the universities during the IEP visits (governance, strategic planning, employability, funding, quality assurance, research and innovation, curricula, internationalization, etc.), language policy is central. The truth is that apart from a few exceptions (universities with renowned resource/language centres) most universities have no or very little language policy; language teachers are very active and dedicated to efficient and effective tuition but their field of action is too often limited and considered as ancillary. This creates more frustration than satisfaction; languages are rarely a priority, funding language centres is problematic and many language teachers are hired on temporary contracts. This makes nobody happy!

We regularly hear generous declarations (from our politicians, for instance) on the rich variety of European cultures and languages seen as a positive challenge and yet very few people are ready to implement a proper higher education language policy.

Higher Education Language Policy makes up a perfectly adapted acronym to the situation: **H.E.L.P** ! Indeed European languages are in danger and it is urgent to react positively in a constructive way.

To regain some happiness and face this language issue in a more satisfactory way, some conditions should be met or at least some key-recommendations could inspire those ready to... help!

1- Good governance; and step out of the comfort zone!

All universities need a strong government, that is a powerful rector with a competent direction team; at the same time good governance means a will to run a university with all the actors from faculty members to administrative staff, to students and stakeholders; a broad consultation system at all levels with all partners, inside and outside the institution, helps when making decisions, or when discussing mission plans.

It is the duty of language teachers to take part in such discussions, to bring their international experience and help build attractive programmes; they should not stay among themselves in a protective way.

Step out of the comfort zone! means work with colleagues of other disciplines, convince them of the importance of languages with innovative projects at institutional level. A good knowledge of the local or regional needs will help build an original language policy offered both to students and to a large population outside the university.

It is interesting to see that a well-thought language policy will clearly reflect the identity and the specificity of an institution in a given context (mobility, international dimension of research teams, minority languages, business and enterprises needs, services to the community, etc.).

A language teacher today must not be afraid of asking the right questions: What part does a liberal art education, notably through languages and intercultural exchanges, play in the contemporary world? Are we not convinced that the labour market requires more than scientific competences? Is not language and cultural literacy the best answer to our very technical and dehumanized world?

The overarching importance of the role of language teachers puts them at the heart of the university development; enough to regain some happiness!

2- Use all the information and action channels! You are not alone!

The amount of literature available on the European language policy issue is impressive; this is due to the many declarations, surveys, reports, projects, thematic networks on languages, and the language policy defined and encouraged by the Commission, notably the 1+2 objective ("ability to communicate in at least two Community languages in addition to a mother tongue ") as defined in 1995 and modified in 2002 ("teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age").

In spite of the fact that these documents are well disseminated (paper publications + easy access online) they are little used in universities; few are read by language teachers; none are read by teachers of other disciplines.

This up-to-date information is absolutely necessary to enlarge our vision and be aware of new trends; this is good food for thought.

Here are some publications that can be of great help to decision makers or language policy actors :

- ***Final Report of the High Level Group on Multilingualism (2007) European Commission***
- ***A rewarding Challenge; how the multiplicity of languages could strengthen Europe (2008) European Commission***
- ***Trends 2010: a decade of change in European higher education (2010) EUA***

The best way to keep informed and to sort out the best publications (too much information kills information) is to work with regional, national or European associations of language teachers; using existing networks and working with them is

reassuring (we are not alone!); the exchange of good practice, the description of success-stories in the field of languages is a strong encouragement; it is an invitation to adopt/adapt parts of projects, and not to copy existing ones, as each university is autonomous and grows within its own social, economic and cultural environment.

The work done by **CEL/ELC (Conseil Européen des langues/ European Language Council)** is immensely rich and helpful; so is the action of **CercleS (The European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education)**. We can also mention **R.E.A.L. European Network of Language Teacher Association**. And there are so many other very efficient associations.

It appears also fundamental to read reviews and journals on the development of language policies; for instance, **The English Journal of Language Policy (EJLP)** or the new publication: **Journal of the European Higher Education Area; policy, practice and institutional engagement** (EUA publication).

It is definitely the duty of the language teacher to be well informed and to discuss different policies and approaches with colleagues. It is certainly the best way to be pro-active.

3- Motivation for languages; motivate students and keep them motivated!

Not an easy job! Particularly when the teachers themselves do not encourage their students to speak/write foreign languages. Teachers are the best motivators, the best advocates of multilingualism, particularly when they speak other languages than their national language.

We know that today the best policy is a laissez-faire policy, which means the domination of English alone.

How do you choose a foreign language (a LOTE: Language Other Than English!)?

Do you have a choice? Does the university help? Can you learn a non-European language at the language centre?

Less students are monolingual because of their desire to be more mobile, to enlarge their employability or career opportunities, to work abroad; or simply because they belong to a multilingual family or environment and are naturally language-happy.

To many students (are teachers aware of this?) languages matter not only for personal reasons (individual development, cognitive advantage, even credit collecting) but also for social reasons because they are interested by local/regional societal issues like minorities and migrants languages, communities languages.

This language multi-competence means an important investment in time (if not money!) and is regarded by many students as necessary; it is a clear sign of open-mindedness.

It has been said that monolingual people are illiterate and that their general motivation is limited...

A recent programme, **MOLAN** network project, brings many elements and contributes to a better understanding of how motivation works. A handbook has just been published: **Handbook on good practice that serves to motivate language learners** (2011); it covers primary, secondary and university education and as such is quite innovative.

A highly recommended reading.

4- Research on languages; a new era.

Language sciences will always prosper; languages evolve and studying their functioning is fundamental; along with fundamental linguistics, other fields of language research are being developed. They concern language and the new tools of communication: e-learning in particular and all the computer assisted education. It is an immense area of research with already precious results. Much remains to be done if we think, for instance, of the social networks, Facebook, Twitter, etc. and the way young people communicate in their mother tongue (first language) or in a foreign language (second language).

New areas will offer important fields of research, this time for socio-linguists; the new needs for language competence in the courts of justice, or in hospitals; the relationship between language behaviour and social behaviour; language conflicts (there are a few in Europe); language and community identity; language and migrants; language and social peace/cohesion; language and the European citizen rights.

It has been said that we must define new typological ways of approaching our European language diversity. This type of research has to be done in our universities and language teachers must participate in the new programmes that will concern such important issues. It will be a very good way to go beyond the academic world and meet different worlds (law, health, police, local authorities, public services, etc.); they expect our cooperation.

Again an enriching, highly rewarding, multidisciplinary and above all humanistic mission is open to language teachers.

A recent project points out this new dynamism in language research: **DYLAN, Language dynamics and management of diversity**. (European Commission, Framework Programme 6)

5- Lingua franca; beware of a lingua franca at university!

It is widely recognized and accepted that English is the most commonly spoken language in Europe and in the world; some people will even say that to speak English is a basic skill.

The real problem is that the most widely spoken language in Europe is not English but... Bad English, known as globish, simplified English, offshore English, or decaffeinated English!!!

A common language of communication is absolutely necessary and we appreciate its use for business, trade, transports, tourism, communication, etc.

It is said that a new language is being born: ELF =English Lingua Franca (very different from EFL = English as a foreign language which remains a European language); ELF is a creative, inventive, innovative language, grammatically, lexically and even phonetically. Even English native speakers are invited to learn how to communicate in ELF! (The reference to the original lingua franca spoken in the Middle Ages by Mediterranean traders and sailors is evident - and not satisfactory! -, a rough oral mixture of Latin languages, Greek, Turk and Arabic).

This ELF, English lingua franca, will simply not do for university education nor for business transactions; one cannot imagine a proper tuition or exchange done in a faulty, low standard, minimal language.

Poor language, poor science! Broken language, bad business!

6- Learn, speak and write a lingua academica, a language for higher education!

Any language used for higher education must be of a high level.

If a university decides that English is their language of education, the teachers' and students' proficiency in English must be high. Standards need to be introduced. And it is the role of the university (as part of its language policy) to improve the English used by staff and students; English then becomes a lingua academica.

Other European languages can be chosen as tuition languages, of course.

Any language, any national language and in some parts of Europe, a regional language, is a lingua academica. In our European universities, 90% of the courses are offered in the national languages. Some universities offer courses in foreign languages (mainly English, which is not enough as we often hear)) in order to attract more students from abroad. Courses in English (apart from English speaking countries, and some countries in the north of Europe where the level of English is quite high) are not of the quality expected and many universities in Europe, as we move south or east, are under the illusion that their foreign language tuition is fully operational and pedagogically satisfactory...

In order to be language happy we must improve our language proficiency; not only foreign language proficiency but also national language proficiency; university teachers of all disciplines complain about the insufficient quality of the national language spoken and written by their own students. Language teachers can surely help young people improve their mother tongue skills; another great task!

7- "The language of Europe is translation" (Umberto Eco)... and interpreting!

This famous, provocative, quotation brings us to another key issue; multiculturalism, knowledge transfer, national communication rely on one of the finest mental activities, translation from one language into another.

Translation has a bright future not only for literary works circulated round the world in so many different languages, but for scientific journals and documents, for the dissemination of knowledge to the largest public (and not limited to the foreign language speakers), etc.

In international conferences more interpreters will be needed to offer a high level service to scientific communities.

These interpreters will be trained in our universities and specialised schools; for our language students it is one of the most stimulating professions; language teachers will easily motivate their students. “Interpreters are language aristocrats”; they play one of the most needed roles of intelligent go-between, clever facilitators, quick-witted communicators.

It is the mission of language teachers to develop within their universities faculties of translation and interpreting as part of a proactive language policy.

A recently published report insists on the fact that “translation and interpreting have become an essential part of public life, a basic human right that every individual should enjoy”. Language teaching and learning have a bright future!

Special Interest Group on Translation and Interpreting for Public Services: final report (2011)

ENVOI

Lingua, lingua franca, lingua academica?

Languages to exchange and/or languages to change the world?

The challenge is big enough to make language teachers happy.

All European university language teachers should read this essay published in 2008 by a group of high-level language happy people under the direction of the writer Amin Alouf:

A rewarding challenge: how the multiplicity of languages could strengthen Europe.

Régis Ritz
Président honoraire
Université Michel de Montaigne
Bordeaux, France

REFERENCES

- **EU Commission** on multilingualism: www.ec.europa.eu/education/languages
- **EUA**- European University Association : website www.eua.be
 - *Trends 2010: a decade of change in European higher education (2010)*
 - *Journal of the European Higher Education Area. Policy, Practice and Institutional Engagement: www.ehea-journal.eu*

All documents published by EUA are online, including the IEP (Institutional Evaluation Programme) reports
- **ENQA** - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education: www.enqa.eu
- **CEL/ELC**- Conseil Européen des Langues/ European Language Council: www.celelc.org

English Journal of Language Policy (EJLP/REPL):/ Revue Européenne de politique linguistique. Liverpool University Press in association with CEL/ELC: www.ejlp.org
- **MOLAN**: Network for the exchange of information about good practice to motivate language learners: www.molan-network.org
- **CercleS**: The European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education : www.cercles.org
- **REAL**: European Network of Language Teacher Associations: www.real-association.eu
- *High Level Group on Multilingualism; Final Report (2007).* DG Education and Culture
- *A rewarding Challenge: how the multiplicity of languages could strengthen Europe (2008),* Proposals from the group for Intercultural dialogue. DG Education and Culture
- The **DYLAN** Project: *Language dynamics and management of diversity (2011):* www.dylan-project.org
- *Special Interest Group on Translation and Interpreting for Public Services, final report (2011).* DG Interpretation

