

Promoting multilingualism and linguistic diversity in Europe: the role of research.

Report on the Workshop held at the Fondation Universitaire de Bruxelles, 1 February 2003

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Introduction

A Reflection Group on Research was set up early in 2002 by the Executive Committee of the CEL/ELC, following a recommendation by the Board of the Association. Chaired by Anne-Claude Berthoud (Université de Lausanne, CH), vice-president of the CEL/ELC, it includes three other members of the Board, Claude Truchot (Université Marc Bloch, Strasbourg, FR), Piet van de Craen (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, BE) and Wolfgang Mackiewicz, president, CEL/ELC.

At a meeting of the Reflection Group held in October 2002, it was decided to launch a research initiative related to the objectives of the CEL/ELC, as inscribed in its statutes: To promote multilingualism and linguistic diversity in Europe in the context of increasing European integration, in order to better meet linguistic needs in the economic, cultural, political and educational environments. This research initiative coincides with many developments at European level, in particular, the link between higher education and research, which is highlighted in the European Commission Communication "*The role of the universities in the Europe of Knowledge*", (1) and which is exemplified in the extension of the European research programme to the humanities and the social sciences.

As a first stage, the Reflection Group organised a workshop with the aim of defining new topics and methods of research consistent with the objectives of the CEL/ELC. Two members of the European Commission were invited to the workshop; Sylvia Vlaeminck, head of the Language Policy Unit, DG for Education and Culture, and Noël Muylle, Director, Directorate A: *Interpretation and Multilingualism*, in the Joint Interpreting and Conference Service (JICS), to reflect on research needs in the two areas which are particularly important for communication and co-operation in a multilingual Europe, namely language learning and teaching, and translation/interpretation. The members of the Reflection Group responded by presenting relevant research scenarios in the context of a European language policy. It was intended that a representative of the DG for Research would comment on these scenarios; however this was not possible on that day. As an alternative, Inge Knudsen of the European University Association (EUA) presented the broad outline of the 6th Framework Programme, and also the EUA's own activities in education and research. Linguists with experience of research at European level were then invited to react to these proposals, namely Ekkehard König (*Freie Universität Berlin*, DE) and George Lüdi (*Universität Basel*, CH). Michael Kelly (*University of Southampton*, UK), who was unable to attend the workshop, subsequently proposed a number of research topics which will be the subject of debate at the Århus conference (*cf.* appendix).

The workshop identified several research themes, for which drafts of projects will be presented in the workshop on Research at the CEL/ELC Conference in Århus, June 26-28, 2003.

The workshop was opened by Wolfgang Mackiewicz, President of the CEL/ELC, who recalled that research, as such, is set down in the statutes as an objective of the Association. However, while the CEL/ELC has largely neglected these goals up to now, the Thematic Network Projects (TNPs) nevertheless provide the foundation on which such research can be based. They have made it possible to identify fields of research which are relevant for the creation of innovative programmes of study in higher education, and at the same time to develop recommendations based on the results of this research. The type of research that the CEL/ELC wants to promote is "policy-driven" research,

designed to contribute to communication and co-operation across linguistic and cultural barriers. In addition, it must explore the benefits and the potential inherent in multilingual research and produce a new generation of researchers specialising in policy-driven and culturally oriented linguistic research.

To this end, various types of actions are envisaged, in particular: the identification of a certain number of priority areas; the adoption and development of suitable interdisciplinary methods of research; the inclusion of key stakeholders; the development of a number of promising pilot projects; the piloting of a European research network project in the area of languages, to analyse the status quo and make specific proposals for research projects (in the full sense of the term). In the short term, Sub-Project 4 of the third Thematic Network Project will be developed, starting in October 2004 under the title, "*Languages and Co-operation between Education and Research*".

Sylvia Vlaeminck, head of the Language Policy Unit of the European Commission (DG for Education and Culture), emphasised the particular feature of this Workshop devoted to "policy-driven" research which she notes with satisfaction, namely that it is applied to the field of education and in particular the area of languages and language learning. Languages are currently on the agenda of the European Commission, as an action plan is envisaged for the middle of this year, following a consultation process which has just been completed. Accordingly, the question of research is of particular importance and is currently the subject of discussion between the various DGs, in particular with the DG for Research.

Among the areas being considered, priority is given to early language learning and multilingual education, for which a whole series of recommendations have been put forward. For early language learning, it is highly desirable that the research to be undertaken would include evaluation of the results, the relationship between results and contextual factors, the study of learning processes, and innovations in language pedagogy. In multilingual education, it is recommended that sources of expertise in the area of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and EMILE (*Enseignement d'une matière par intégration d'une langue étrangère*), should form a *consortium*, to propose transnational projects under the 6th Framework Programme 2002-2006, with the aim of identifying, proposing and establishing solutions to implement the formula "1+2".

In this context, Ms Vlaeminck also proposed interdisciplinary research involving existing and future interactive multimedia technology relevant to a transnational CLIL/EMILE.

Noël Muylle, Director, Directorate A: Interpretation and Multilingualism, JICS, focused his intervention on the two questions which he considers essential, firstly the contribution of multilingualism to the construction of Europe, and secondly the cost of non-multilingualism in Europe.

Europe is made up of a mosaic of sovereign states in continual transformation. A Union is also a mosaic of languages and cultures, and its diversity represents its originality and its richness. The Union has created decision-making institutions adaptable to both change and diversity. Multilingual communication in particular facilitates integration, allowing delegates and representatives of various countries to express themselves in the language that they know best, to present, argue and defend ideas and interests.

While the existence of languages which are more widespread than others and the benefits of a *lingua franca* for business and political negotiations are today undisputed, it is nevertheless absurd to imagine that everybody must speak English, a concept resulting from the drift of political discourse towards economic discourse, founded on the illusion of transparency and mutual comprehension. The command of several languages represents an asset and a source of personal development, but implies fundamental changes to the system which should not be left solely in the hands of politicians and journalists. However, there are no ready-made solutions and much work remains to be done.

In the Europe of knowledge, recommended by the Heads of State and Government, an interdisciplinary research project on the economy of languages is essential, corresponding exactly to the objectives of the 6th Framework Programme.

Anne-Claude Berthoud, *Université de Lausanne*, presented the objectives and the general framework of the proposed research. She explained that this research aims to provide research-based solutions to the multilingual challenge of Europe, which should be seen as a political, economic, cultural, professional, educational and more particularly cognitive challenge. It also aims to define the framework within which these solutions would be reached.

It is particularly important to show the central and transversal role of languages in the production and the transmission of knowledge, and thus to convince heads of institutions and politicians that multilingualism concerns everyone. In other words, multilingualism is a competence to be developed and a cognitive instrument to be used in the production of knowledge in other disciplines. Widening the field of research calls for linguistic and disciplinary decompartmentalisation. Linguistic decompartmentalisation would lead to an integrated concept of languages, and disciplinary decompartmentalisation to a new type of relationship between languages and academic disciplines. However, widening the field of research implies initiating new forms of research, interdisciplinary and policy-driven research, in phase with the developing context and meeting urgent needs, while creating the instruments for the analysis of these needs.

Additionally, this research calls for the creation of networks of existing teams, or the constitution of new teams at European level, with the aim of creating a European field of research devoted to multilingualism, under the aegis of the CEL/ELC. In addition, European doctoral schools should be created to train young graduates to conduct research on multilingualism. These schools would constitute an extension of existing research training at national level.

Piet van de Craen, *Vrije Universiteit Brussel*, underlined the importance of multilingual education throughout Europe, despite the fact that its highly politicised aspects and ideological connotations are in marked contrast to common academic opinion on the matter. Whereas international academics in Europe and beyond are convinced of the benefits of multilingual education, politicians and heads of education institutions respond very slowly or negatively to the reforms necessary for its implementation. This may be due to the fact that in spite of its acceptance in academic circles, a certain number of factors are still unknown, because of gaps in research. It is important to emphasise the lack of research in the following areas: the subtle influence of sociolinguistic factors such as dominant v. non-dominant languages in multilingual education, as well as the educational consequences; the long-term influence of multilingual teaching and learning; the relationship between guided and non-guided learning in this method; and age-related variables. It is crucial to increase the amount of research in these fields in order to confirm the importance of multilingual education and thus to influence in a more targeted manner the development of educational policies in Member States.

Claude Truchot, *Université Marc Bloch*, highlighted the need for a reappraisal of accepted thinking on the idea of a *lingua franca* and in particular of the views conveyed and reinforced by the media. These are based above all on stereotypes, and in particular on that of English as the natural language of business. He called for research on these issues to show, for example, what one can do with such a common language. This issue is linked to the more general issue of the use of languages in the workplace, and in particular that of the use of languages for special purposes. Furthermore, in the area of needs analysis, one is faced with the declarations of employers, who do not really know what their needs are and who also tend to express generally accepted ideas about English.

However, one of the major difficulties lies in carrying out research based on figures (*cf.* Eurobarometer). The results correspond to what people have said to be the case, but not to real verbal behaviour. Consequently, there is a need to develop instruments for both analysis and evaluation. Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether or not this kind of research can be carried out, as the universities are institutions where languages are constituted in relatively isolated "fortresses", and language specialists are hardly prepared for the study of language use in the workplace.

This explains the need for the development of a language policy both as a motor of change and as a policy on research in language, taking the form, for example, of research centres on multilingualism with PhD researchers. This is the way for multilingualism to achieve the status of an object of

research, while extending the range of traditional linguistic objectives and creating a new state of mind. It is thus advisable to integrate research on languages into institutional language policy.

Inge Knudsen, *European University Association*, recalled the mission of the EUA, which is to promote a coherent system of higher education and research in Europe. Its principal challenges are the creation of a European research area and a European higher education area, as well as to advise and support its members and to work in collaboration with its partners (TRENDS, ECTS, Quality Culture, Joint Masters Pilot). More particularly, the Second Convention of European Higher Education Institutions is all about bringing together Europe and the rest of the world, defining the bonds between teaching and research, promoting a culture of quality in European universities, and advancing the Bologna and Prague processes through specific lines of action.

In the context of languages in higher education (HE), in particular for Joint Masters Pilot Programmes, there appears to be a marked tendency to use English as a *lingua franca* among the more successful projects. In the European degrees, pragmatic solutions (i.e. using English) for the purpose of being competitive are not sufficient; support is necessary for multilingual projects. Their advantage could be based on linguistic and cultural diversity. In the context of the linguistic challenges in the area of research, MORESS (Mapping of Research in European Social Sciences) aims at creating a European research area by seeking solutions in research based on cultural, national and linguistic relations. In Humanities and the Social Sciences within the 6th Framework Programme, national barriers must be broken down.

Ekkehard König, *Freie Universität Berlin*, designated as priorities research topics which evaluate the intellectual, economic and political benefits and consequences of multilingualism, as opposed to those related to monolingualism, and also emphasised the potential and the effectiveness of measures which are currently being taken to promote multilingualism. Particularly noteworthy among these measures are the early teaching of foreign languages, the acquisition of partial competence, exchanges and mobility, and innovative methods (CALL, interactive learning, multilingual education, new educational environments).

Another major field is that of the teaching of multilingual competence, in particular creating new forms of co-operation between linguists and language centres. One of today's problems lies in focusing on one language without really making connections with others, underlining the differences between grammatical structures. Greater attention must be given to similarities and parallels between the languages being learned as basic linguistic assets in order to better integrate knowledge of the various languages in a coherent whole.

To this end, it is necessary to envisage projects designed to develop didactic material for comparison between languages, to produce grammars of individual languages on a comparative basis and partial contrastive grammars relating to language pairs, to develop comparative descriptions of specific fields or fragments of languages, providing a global view of the common features and parameters of variation. Teaching materials and courses on the families of European languages can also be developed (Germanic languages, Romance languages, etc.).

Georges Lüdi, *Université de Bâle*, raised the issue of the gap between policies in favour of linguistic diversity and the allocation of very limited funding to languages. As a result students are giving up language study, and language teaching is producing poor results. It is thus necessary to change this situation, particularly through research on stereotypes and more generally on the perceptions of the various actors, mainly decision-makers and parents. In addition, individual, economic and political needs must be defined within the interdisciplinary framework of research on the costs and the benefits of multilingualism. However, the analysis of needs requires adequate instruments so that future needs can be anticipated.

The *lingua franca* is another priority area of research, focusing in particular on misunderstandings between those speaking English. Concentration on the risks of misunderstandings would be a way of making a *lingua franca* possible, identifying what one can do with it, so that it is really functional and not in competition with the other languages.

Another field of research is that of brain imagery: to say that humans are made to be multilingual has consequences in the sectors of the brain concerned, depending on whether late bilinguals or early bilinguals are involved. Large-scale research on CLIL is also recommended to create alternatives to traditional teaching. Lastly, research should be developed on the production and transmission of knowledge and on the essential role that multilingualism has to play as a conceptual framework.

Concluding remarks and future directions (Claude Truchot)

Claude Truchot emphasised that this Workshop is part of a long-term action plan developed by the CEL/ELC Reflection Group on Research. It is important to discover on the one hand if this ambition would correspond to the needs and objectives of those involved in the creation of Europe, and on the other hand, if research could contribute to the development of linguistic diversity and multilingualism in Europe. This explains the question on the "cost of non-multilingualism in Europe" for example. The contribution of the invited researchers has clearly been particularly fruitful, and dialogue and collaboration seem possible. The debate must now be widened and criteria found which will make it possible to delve further into the issues, to make choices and define priorities.

It is possible to envisage contrastive work integrating neurological and cognitive approaches to multilingualism, and several sub-projects could be set up within one global project, leading to the creation of new networks. With this in mind, new means of funding are required, in particular from the DG for Research. In addition, the EUA's activities are particularly interesting from the linguistic point of view, and one can see a clear link between these activities and the key questions raised. The possibility of a partnership should be explored.

Nevertheless, a certain number of obstacles should not be ignored, particularly obstacles of an institutional nature. Hence the importance of institutionalising research, with an extended range of objectives, by researchers whose new objectives are taken seriously by their institutions. To institutionalise such projects at European level, the value of multilingualism would have to be proved, and it would require support in seeking funding. This is closely linked to the concept of a Europe of knowledge (*cf.* Lisbon) and the cost of a non-multilingual Europe. While the CEL/ELC has above all concerned itself with issues in language learning until now, it must now find a new specific purpose and set out in a new direction.

Some orientations for pilot projects

A certain number of recurring topics emerge from these reflections, notably concerning the economic, professional and educational challenges of multilingualism.

A first research orientation which seems essential is that of the cost of a non-multilingual Europe, possibly based on research in language economy.

A second research orientation concerns the use of languages in the workplace, as well as the needs expressed in the area and the development of instruments to analyse them.

A third type of issue relates to the challenges of multilingual education in the production and the transmission of knowledge, and the contextual factors which are linked to this.

All this research would also form part of the more general framework of reflection on the competences necessary in the creation of the Europe of knowledge.

Appendix

Ideas for language-related research projects

Mike Kelly, University of Southampton, UK

Language student profiles

This project would ask who is studying languages in Higher Education in Europe and consider issues

relating to social composition of student body and how access could be widened. The study would deal with questions of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, nationality and linguistic background. It would attempt to ascertain whether or not language study is limited to certain groups of students and why (and how) this is so.

Graduate outcomes for language students in Europe

This project would focus on the employment opportunities taken up by recent language graduates in Europe. It would aim to produce a professional profile of language graduates as they currently appear, would look at future trends and possibilities, and would compare the profiles produced by different types of language-related degree.

Compulsion in language study

This project would identify where and to what extent is foreign language study compulsory in Europe, specifying differences between countries, institutions, levels of education, specialist courses, and particular languages. It would suggest what conditions are needed for compulsion to be successful as an educational strategy; how compulsory language study affects linguistic competence and/or attitudes towards languages; what factors affect the decisions to make language study compulsory or otherwise throughout Europe; how compulsory language courses are integrated into higher education programmes.

Teaching of native language as a foreign or second language

This project would study recent developments in the teaching of native language as a foreign or second language (English as a Foreign Language, *Français Langue Étrangère* etc.), and the impact of these on the teaching of foreign languages.

Social and linguistic context training

This project would study ways in which trainee language teachers could best be trained to recognise and respond to the diversity of social and linguistic contexts in which their teaching will occur. In order to achieve this, the content of language teacher training should include comparative studies in national education systems, linguistic diversity and language policy issues, focusing on the practical implications and strategies for addressing them in teaching. A preliminary study should be commissioned to develop proposals as a basis for wide consultation.

Rationales for language study

This project would develop a systematic listing of reasons why students might or should wish to study languages. It would address the reasons why students of other disciplines should continue supplementary language study, especially when it is not compulsory; why some students should specialise in a language as a subject in its own right; and what language-related careers are available that might attract students to specialise.

Specialist language degree curricula

This project would build on the work of the TNP2 sub-project in curriculum innovation, and undertake an extensive review of curriculum offerings in specialist language degrees, comparing patterns across countries. It would identify current trends and attempt to map degrees against the career outcomes for graduates.

Differentiation of language provision

This project would identify the ways in which language provision is differentiated from provision in other subjects, in all education sectors. It would include analysis of the use of teaching support staff other than teachers, location of teaching in different places or at different times, use of different accreditation and validation processes, development of specialist educational facilities, and relations between the private and public sector in provision.

Pedagogical models for e-learning

This project would develop recommendations for improvements in pedagogical models, curriculum development (including assessment), and educational practice in e-learning in languages. E-learning is understood in a broad sense, to include open, distance, and face-to-face education using learning

technology. The project would review literature on pedagogical models with particular relevance to e-learning, map the provision of e-learning in languages in higher education, and develop case studies of effective practice.

Mapping provision of languages in higher education

This project would compile an inventory of language provision currently available in higher education in Europe. It would include different types of language-related degrees (philology, applied languages, teacher training, translation and interpreting) as well as languages for non-specialists. It would analyse the different languages taught, different types of institution, and different types of teaching unit. It would establish the numbers of students currently pursuing these studies, and trace the evolution of numbers over the past five years. Identifying key trends, it would make projections of likely future changes, and make recommendations on how changes could be shaped to enhance the language competence of students at European universities.

Notes:

([1](#)) COM (2003) 58 final.