

MULTILINGUALISM IN THE KNOWLEDGE-BASED SOCIETY
**The universities' contribution to professional integration, employability and
lifelong learning**

TNP3 YEAR-TWO CLOSING CONFERENCE
30 September-1 October 2005

Opening Session
Friday, 30 September 2005, 2.15 p.m.

Introductory remarks by Wolfgang Mackiewicz

Dean Barlebo Rasmussen

Monsieur le Directeur générale honoraire

Distinguished guests

Representatives of the European Commission

Dear colleagues, friends, and students

Ladies and gentlemen

It is probably not a coincidence that this Conference is being hosted by a business university. After all, in this our third Thematic Network in the Area of Languages – TNP3 – we seek to get a clearer understanding of the contribution that higher education language studies can and should make to one of the core aims of the Bologna Process: to develop study programmes combining academic quality with relevance to lasting employability.

Of course, from the days of the SIGMA pilot project on, we always made it our task to identify changing needs in the language professions, for example in language teaching and in language mediation, as well as on the labour market in general, and to develop – in response to these needs - recommendations for curriculum innovation in higher education language studies. Hence our long-standing collaboration with the EU's interpretation services. Hence our attempts, in the first Thematic Network and in the subsequent dissemination project, to enter into dialogue with what we have since come to call ***stakeholder representatives*** – people from ministries and from professional associations as well as from the public and private sector, from employers' organisations and from the unions. Hence the survey among employers conducted by the TNP1 sub-project "Language studies for students of other disciplines". To that extent, TNP3 builds on the rationale, activities and outcomes of its predecessor projects.

However, I think it has to be admitted that in previous Thematic Networks we were also frequently guided by convictions and enlightened speculation. We firmly believed – and I think, quite rightly so – that in an increasingly integrated Europe the

dissemination and learning of less widely used and less taught languages is of great importance, and that universities have a special responsibility in this respect. This is part of the rationale underlying the companion project – the European Network for the Promotion of Language Learning Among All Undergraduates. However, what we have witnessed since the turn of the century is an increasing awareness – at least in certain circles – of the economic dimension of multilingual proficiency. Multilingual EU citizens are better able to take advantage of the freedom to work and study in other Member States than citizens who are monolingual or only have one other language. In other words – languages for enhanced opportunities on the European labour market. This is the EU citizen side of the multilingual economy coin. The other side is that of the linguistic needs of European enterprise. The development of a European labour force with appropriate language skills is important for enabling European enterprise to make the most of the opportunities provided by the Single Market, to internationalise their activities and to increase cross-border co-operation.

I think this is the message we shall hear more and more loudly coming out of Brussels – at least from those directorates general that are in Commissioner Figel's Multilingualism camp. Language learning and multilingual proficiency are regarded as being crucial to the success of the Lisbon Process aimed at ensuring economic progress and social cohesion. However, when we then turn to the views expressed by employers and employers' associations, we find – generally speaking – that the message of 1+>2 has failed to take root. Many here in this hall will remember the speech made at the TNP3 launch meeting by a lady from the German employers' organisation, who said quite bluntly that Brussels' insistence on the economic relevance of multilingual proficiency was ideology and that English was the only thing that mattered on the European and international labour market – in other words, that English was enough – an opinion that tallies with the findings of the Tuning project.

This is why in TNP3 we want to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the status quo across Europe; this is why we decided to focus our efforts on two types of activities trialled in a number of TNP1 sub-projects –

- Europe-wide consultation among graduates and employers regarding languages and linguistic skills relevant on the European labour market, and
- the development of structures at various levels designed to facilitate continuous consultation between universities and other stakeholders.

Recent experiences have shown that neither of the two activities is easy to arrange. The development of the questionnaires to be used in the consultation was a painstakingly slow process; the consultation itself has been beset with unexpected technical difficulties. And, even more frustrating, it has proved almost impossible to persuade people from enterprise, from employers' organisations, and even from DG Employment, to come to Copenhagen. This is why we are all the more grateful that a representative of the Confederation of Danish Industries will be addressing us this afternoon.

The consultation and our efforts to involve people from the world of work in TNP3 activities probably have to be seen as being interrelated. I think we can only hope to persuade representatives of enterprise to sit down with us if we can confront them with data that are different from their own perception of the relatively small relevance of multilingual skills and competences to economic success. For example, if the responses received from graduates were significantly different than those received from industry, we might have a case. We may find that the initial outcomes of the

consultation to be presented later this afternoon and tomorrow morning are inconclusive. Let me just add two points. The outcomes of the consultation will at best tell us something about the recent past and the status quo. They will probably not allow us to make predictions about future needs, and they will not tell us anything about business lost due to lack of multilingual skills among the workforce. This is why we are looking forward with keen expectation to the outcomes of a study commissioned by the Directorate General for Education and Culture on “The effects on the EU economy of shortages of foreign language skills in enterprise”. This is why we are keen to jointly reflect with employers on possible future linguistic needs in enterprise.

It stands to reason that the results of our consultation will also be relevant to the work undertaken in other thematic network projects. This is why we welcome the initiative taken by the co-ordinator of the network of thematic networks in the hard sciences and in technology to co-operate with TNP3, and I should like to take this opportunity to welcome the co-ordinator of this network of networks, Professor Francesco Maffioli, and two distinguished colleagues of his to this Conference.

Perhaps not surprisingly, it has proved much less difficult to lure representatives of the language industry to Copenhagen. In fact, in the end we had to open a kind of waiting list – such was the interest in our sub-project on “Languages for language-related industries and professions”. Apparently, people in the language industry do not need to be convinced of the relevance of graduates’ linguistic and language-related skills and competences to their own success. When we designed TNP3, we were already aware of major changes underway in the language industry. Initial results of the consultation conducted among both employers and graduates seem to confirm this. There are new job profiles, requiring new skills and competences. Certain types of jobs such as that of the community and court interpreter have gained in importance – which is not surprising in view of increasing trans-European mobility and migration into the Union. We shall, among other things, have to ask ourselves in what ways we can prepare specialist students for a language industry that is strikingly different from what it was nine years ago, when we started our first Thematic Network.

The technical difficulties encountered in data gathering and data analysis have had a very serious effect on sub-project 3 “Languages as an interface between the different sectors of education”, where we do not as yet have any analysed data at all. I am all the more grateful to Neva Šlibar and other members of the sub-project working group for their preparing a new agenda for their meetings at this Conference at very short notice indeed.

The consultation got off to a late start. However, the fact that a large number of people completed our questionnaires at the beginning or even during the summer holiday period is encouraging and shows that we are on the right track. Because of this, we have decided to continue the consultation for a few more weeks. Of course, the time factor is important. I am, therefore, glad to say that measures have been taken to professionalize the technical side of the consultation and to speed up the process of data analysis.

In the Report by the President which I am going to present at tomorrow’s General Meeting of the European Language Council, I shall report on advances made in EU-

funded research on the topic of linguistic diversity in Europe. I should like to see the call put out by DG Research last December as a breakthrough in the Framework Programmes. This is why we are particularly pleased to be able to welcome, for the first time ever, a colleague from DG Research in our midst. Of course, academics in the humanities enjoy the dubious reputation of simply requesting money for research without specifying and justifying the aims of the research they wish to undertake. In the workshop conducted by our working group on Education and Research we hope to show that we can do better than that.

Some of the national reports prepared in sub-project 2 point to the increasing importance attached by certain sectors of enterprise to non-European languages. In TNP1 we had a sub-project on non-Community languages, which I felt obliged to fold up after the first year because colleagues could not agree on what they wanted to focus on:

- European regional and minority languages
- immigrant languages
- major non-European languages

Eight years on, we made a fresh start in our pilot experience “Arabic Language and Culture”. The work undertaken in this pilot experience to date has shown two things:

- there is every reason for extending our TN approach to major non-European languages;
- the TN method only works if it is applied on a European level, that is if we can involve experts from across Europe.

This is why I am immensely pleased and grateful that so many experts with a stake in Arabic language and culture have accepted our invitation to come to Copenhagen in order to assess the initial results of our admittedly limited mapping of current provision and to reflect on future European co-operation in this field.

As is usual, I have reserved the most important point for the end of my speech. Since the dissemination network carried out in 1999-2000, we have co-operated with ESIB – the National Unions of Students in Europe. An ESIB representative sits on the TNP3 Co-ordinating Committee. However, this is our first TN meeting at which we have a substantial number of student participants. I am convinced that the presence of students from ESIB, from the Erasmus Student Network and from a number of schools of translation and interpretation will have a profound impact on our deliberations today and tomorrow. I also hope that our students will take the results of this meeting and indeed of TNP3 as a whole back to their organisations and institutions. I hope they will become allies in our attempt to bring higher education provision in language studies more into line with present and future requirements. May I, then, take this opportunity to thank the European Commission for their generous support of the short-term student mobility initiative, ESIB and ESN and the T&I schools involved for their co-operation, and Karen Lauridsen for co-ordinating this pilot experience.

During the course of the Conference, there will be many more occasions for thanking the Copenhagen Business School in general and Ole Helmersen and his team in particular for organising and supporting this Conference. At this point, I should just like to say that we are immensely grateful for the warm reception extended to us here today. We are very glad to be able to hold this meeting at CBS, we are glad to be in Copenhagen and we are glad to be back in Denmark after only two years.