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European Symposium. Language Teachers: training for a new paradigm

Rapporteur's report

Glyn Williams

Centre for European Research, Wales

sos004@bangor.ac.uk

The focus of the meeting was on the training of language teachers in the contemporary world. This is a very broad topic and it is therefore somewhat surprising that so many of the papers were similar. The on-going processes of globalisation and modernisation are having profound implications for how we understand language and how the teaching of languages is obliged to change as a consequence. How economic deregulation has prompted a new flow of capital matched by a new migration flows obliges a concern with new language contexts and a willingness to address the opportunities afforded by these flows. The associated elaboration of an economy that focuses upon the centrality of shared meaning within team working environments brings language to the heart of the associated concern with knowledge and innovation. However, it is a different understanding of language from that fostered by the nation state with its concern with the use of syntax as a political tool that reinforces standardisation. The new conception involves a concern with transculturalism and with changes in the construction and contextualisation of the language object. It is these issues that are to the fore in this opening EUNOM symposium.

The first paper by Tullio de Mauro was a very erudite and professional presentation that emphasised the benefits of multilingual education. In so doing he emphasised the work of William F. Mackey and Miquel Siguan (1918–2010) who produced a report on the topic some years ago in which they advocated an education system based on a linguistic reality that was different from that which focused on the school language. De Mauro argued that only about 200 of the world's 2,500 or so written languages were legitimised by the UN. He addressed the role of the nation state in legitimising specific languages, but argued that while this may well have addressed the issue of efficiency it was not necessarily a process that was meant to affect other languages used within the territory. It was an argument that was reinforced by Gramsci who forcibly stated that the focus on a single state language should not trample on the multilingualism of the state. The focus on the work of Gramsci inevitably obliges a recall of how he prioritised the superstructure over the infrastructure and how this inevitably leads to a discussion of the relationship between language and ideology.

De Mauro reminds us that the Italian state was consolidated at a time when few outside of Tuscany were familiar with Italian. Only between 2.5% and 9.0% of the population of the new state could speak it. De Mauro argued that priority should not be given to the

predominant languages. Rather, minority languages should be deployed in order to learn other languages. Recent developments in Italy have involved the passing of a law in 1989 that would acknowledge the rights of minority language speakers. However, for many years this remained a de jure rather than de facto statement, and even after it was implemented it has remained polemical. He concluded with the claim that it is necessary to provide access to a language and the associated culture without having a negative effect on the rights of anyone. This involves paying attention to the principle of an equality of people, languages and cultures as the basis of democracy. In this respect his paper was a clear presentation of the shift in the discussion of the principle of justice from a simple concern with inequality to encompass a focus on different bases of inequality within multiculturalism. It also serves as a timely reminder that the role of the state in language production and reproduction is changing.

There was an overlap between the papers presented by Kelly, McKendry and Pachler, and, to a lesser extent, the papers by Čok and Risager. What unites them is the argument that a discourse that derives from neo-liberalism is setting profound constraints on the more orthodox principles of language teaching and learning. They strive to come to terms with the fact that these new conditions oblige a reformulation of the theoretical and conceptual basis of language in education.

The details of the shifting discourse was clearly presented by [Eugene KcKendry](#) who also conveyed the frustration of practitioners that are obliged to come to terms with it. It involves a paradigm shift and a change in the basic assumption of language learning and teaching. The educational discourse has been shifting from programmes of study to flexibility, customized learning and a concern with the needs of the individual. At the core of this liberalisation is a concern with learning to learn. It also involves an emphasis on theories of learning, rather than on a focus that relates to the individual subject being taught. This reflects a shift from a concern with content to a focus on the emotional, social, cultural and moral development of the learner, and how the curriculum emphasises knowledge, understanding and skills.

The context for much of this paper was the UK, where there has been a rapid decline in the numbers learning foreign languages. This derives from a change of policy that has reduced the degree of compulsion to study foreign languages in schools. This dovetails with the conception among learners that languages are difficult and not particularly useful. The outcome involves policy contradictions: a wider range of languages is available but the numbers studying languages has declined significantly.

Michael Kelly's paper ([abstract](#)) picks up on many of these points. He argues that changes in the social context demand new approaches that are contextualised within a new paradigm. He considers the European profile for language teacher education, for which he was responsible, as a framework that was constructed out of the new context. He claims that it responds to the fact that the way we live has experienced a marked change in the organisation of physical space and cultural action that insists upon multiculturalism. This is partly because of the enhanced migratory flows that have contributed to an expansion in the modes of language contact which, in turn, should lead to enhanced creativity. On the other hand, the relationship between language and power has a greater influence than the attitudes of individual speakers, in that it penetrates entire language communities.

The changing context has multiplied and changed the arguments in favour of language learning, leading to an entirely new approach to language teaching that lead to new models of the nature of the language learner. Whereas within the earlier context it focused on aiming for native speaker proficiency, this is now seen as an obstacle to language learning in that it is predicated on failure. The new models focus on the plurilingual communicator, the intelligent listener, the intercultural mediator, etc. Similarly, there is a shift in focus to the motivating force of achievement rather than failure. The entire re-contextualisation involves a shift from learning a language to learning 'to language', that is, to an emphasis on the use of whatever language resources the individual possesses in learning new outcomes. This, in turn links with how we understand education.

The new context stresses partial competence and encompasses differentiated achievement levels that involve language production, reception and interaction. There is an associated move away from reading, writing and listening to a concern with communication strategies, in which the speaker is able to select from her repertoire in elaborating an effective way of communicating in context. This means that a new language teacher paradigm is required, in which the focus is more on educating language teachers rather than the teachers of specific languages. Every teacher, regardless of the discipline, should be a language-aware teacher. This involves a shift in professional identity, partly because language teachers are no longer content-neutral.

Norbert Pachler's contribution focused on how teachers are to be prepared to teach in multilingual, multicultural and ethnically diverse context. This was contextualised by a brief account of how socio political change at the macro and meso levels is presenting a real challenge for language education. Globalisation has contributed to the development of a proliferation of variants and varieties within different contexts. Europe is becoming increasingly diverse with the increase in the range of migrations within its boundaries. This means that 'national languages' are less adequate as descriptors for linguistic and sociolinguistic practices that now require a more measured view of 'language' in education, as well as new resources that may not necessarily be designed for academic achievement. Monolingualism is no longer adequate since the current world demands knowledge of languages for social and geographical mobility.

The move away from purity of linguistic performance to the language of democratic citizenship and how it demands an openness to other cultures involves how J.M.E. Blommaert (2011) emphasises the way in which urban contexts are increasingly characterised by a diasporic, globalised multilingualism; the need to reflect changes in the macro conditions in the micro context of teacher education; and how multilingualism involves coordinating resources and interactionally-framed practices. Pachler restates McKendry's emphasis on flexibility, and the elaboration of dynamic tools that confront contextual change. In this sense ethnicity is itself a counter hegemonic force. The focus shifts away from what the individual has, or does not have, to a concern with what the environment demands. He is less involved with a truncated competence than with the linguistic competence conditioned by needs that derive from specific contexts. The lack of competence is a problem that involves much more than the inadequacy of a specific speaker. The notion of a standard language disappears, giving way to language mixing and hybridity.

Lucija Čok's paper (also available in English) drew together various theoretical contexts: European historical narrative; European values; the communication and exchange of information as the key for communication strategies; etc. A thread running through her paper was the quest for an education for tolerance involving values that provide relevance at the level of nations and ethnic groups. Her focus was on the new context for an understanding of the acquisition of linguistic and intercultural competence. It involves a critical and tolerant dialogue that engages with the need to create inter-cultural awareness and involves how to compose different contexts for varying involvement in mediation. It will inevitably involve the rewriting of memory and a cultural-linguistic interaction wherein different ideas are exchanged in a social context. She placed considerable stress on the claim that '…the road to myself lies through another', reiterating Émile Benveniste's (1971) argument about how the existence of an "I" exists only because there is a 'you' into which the 'I' can be transformed. This in turn has strong affinities with the work of both Bakhtin and Wittgenstein. Her paper engages with how political scientists have extended Habermas' call for a form of discursive democracy to embrace a citizenship of residence that will involve the interests of immigrants (Balibar, 2004).

Whereas the other papers made reference to culture, often as a homogenous and undifferentiated notion, Karen Risager, in confronting the issue of the language teacher facing the need to engage with transnationality, focused on this concept. She argued that if we are obliged to rethink the notion of language then this also obliges a rethinking of the relationship between language and culture. Influenced by postmodernism, late modernity, globalisation, localisation, transnationality and transculturalism the focus has shifted to a concern with the crisis of identity of the language subject away from the concern with national identity and nation building that separated language teachers. It leads to a re-evaluation of language to encompass language use as social practice, linguistic resources and the emphasis that 'language' is no more than a social construct. Language practices are integrated into different networks of different reach, and immigration should be thought of in terms of a flow of language resources and their relationship to language learning. As such it involves a transnational and global understanding of the language object. The monolingual focus of the national paradigm is replaced with a comparison of languages and language encounters.

The relationship between language and culture is re-evaluated moving from how the national paradigm stresses the integration of language and culture to an awareness that language can be culturally neutral. A target language is not necessarily tied to a target language-state, and cultural contexts and contacts can be found anywhere. Furthermore, a target language does not necessarily determine texts, topics and areas of knowledge. The argument that a language is never culturally neutral would claim that any language carries meaning in the form of culture, and that each language has its own language-culture. This is taken up by reference to three dimensions – the semantic-pragmatic, the poetic and the identity dimensions. The individual's linguistic-culture is stored with other language-cultures. If this is correct then the focus must be on how culture divides languages, recognising that divisions in a language also involve divisions in identities. It stresses the link between cultural identity and the construction of otherness. The entire homogeneity of language dissolves, regardless of the status of the language. As such it obliges an engagement with a global,

postcolonial and transnational perspective that involves embedding the national in a wider perspective.

The one paper that stood out as being different from the others was that by Tunde Dokus who focused on the role of the new technology in language learning. She covered a wide range of contexts for the use of IT that integrated methodological and highly practical operations. While recognising the need for new tasks associated with language learning she focused very clearly on how the new technology could improve language learning. This is a theme to which we will return in a later symposium.

On the second day we had two papers that focused heavily on language teaching methods. Firstly Sònia Prats focused attention on the relationship between the teacher and the student's conception of need by reference to language learning. This involved an engagement with the political, and the relationship between the normative and the political. In this respect it picks up with Pachler's concern with the responsibility of the theoretician and the practitioner. Her discussion of lingua franca raised questions about the political boundaries of language and how it has structured the demos/ethnos relationship. It is hardly surprising that, in common with Karen Risager, she stressed the need for a new understanding of the nature of 'language'. As such it involves liberation from notions of 'standard' and 'ownership'.

This was followed by June Eyckmans' paper which expressed the same concerns about the changing demands of language teaching confronted by a changing conception of the language object. She argues that it obliges a shift from an overriding concern with the language purity of the standardised 'national' form, to a focus on practical aspects of fostering mutual understanding. She offers an applied perspective involving a syntagmatic approach where the focus is on content. It involves a shift away from linguistic formalism to a focus on natural language. It emphasises again the difference between language and linguistics. The shift in perspective in language learning involves a concern with language use as social practice, rather than the hitherto predominant top down approach. It engages with content based learning and a focus on phrase learning.

During the discussion Encarnación Carrasco called for alternative, less anglocentric views on the whole subject.

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