

Internationalisation, Mobility and Integration at Higher Education Institutions

Promoting and Researching Pluri- and Multilingualism at Language Centres

Stephan Meyer, Petra Gekeler, Daniela Urank | Basel

Die Förderung der Mehrsprachigkeit spielt eine zentrale Rolle bei der Internationalisierung von Hochschulen. Sprachenzentren können dabei einen wichtigen Beitrag leisten. Dies gilt gleichermaßen für die Verbesserung der Mobilität und die Integration von Studierenden, Dozierenden und Forschenden. Wir berichten darüber, wie auf institutioneller Ebene Mehrsprachigkeit verankert werden kann und wie Studierende am Sprachenzentrum der Universität Basel mit ihr umgehen. Wir stellen dazu ein neu entwickeltes Kursmodul "Kommunikationstraining im mehrsprachigen Umfeld" vor, in dem die Teilnehmenden lernen und üben, mehrere Sprachen im gleichen Kontext einzusetzen und den akademischen und öffentlichen Diskurs dadurch zu bereichern. Zum Schluss erwähnen wir Fragen, die in weiterführender Forschung zur Mehrsprachigkeit an Hochschulen Aufmerksamkeit verdienen.



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The assumption that students at higher education institutions will automatically maintain and/or acquire communicative competence in the languages they need for their studies, their work, and to participate in society is increasingly viewed with scepticism. Instead, there is growing acceptance that systematic institutional promotion of these skills is imperative, also on tertiary level. The need to actively intervene is further strengthened by the growing internationalisation of tertiary education institutions and curricula; the increased mobility of students and academics; and the mounting need to integrate national and international students and staff into local contexts. Global and regional social processes – such as the creation of a European Higher Education Area as envisaged by the Bologna reforms – inflect with local language practices. The outcomes are a mixture of bane and boon, which elicits a range of sometimes paradoxical behaviours. Language Centres have become one of the established instruments in higher education institutions to promote multi- and plurilingualism. In

Switzerland, the last decade saw the rapid institutionalisation of language courses for students of other disciplines and, in some cases, the establishment of dedicated Language Centres. Presently thirteen higher education institutions are affiliated to the *Enseignement des Langues dans les Hautes Ecoles en Suisse* (FHS-ELHE), which has an advisory role to the *Conférence des Recteurs des Universités Suisses* (CRUS).

More than a decade into the Bologna process and with internationalisation high on the agenda, we clearly need to improve our understanding of multilingualism in higher education. We need to take stock of the status quo and we need to prepare ourselves for future developments. In contrast to the more established research, didactic materials, and interventions on the school level, we still know relatively little about multilingual practices in higher education institutions in Europe in general and in Switzerland in particular (A selection from the few available studies includes Morel, 2009; Schaffner, 2012; Studer, Pelli-Ehrensperger & Kelly, 2009; Veronesi & Nickenig, 2009). Accordingly, the Language Centre at the University of Basel undertook a mixed methods study in 2011 and 2012 to enhance our understanding of students' attitudes and behaviours pertaining to pluri- and multilingualism in higher education.

We start with a sketch of the measures that the Language Centre has undertaken to promote pluri- and multilingualism on the institutional level. This is followed by selected findings from the quantitative and qualitative data that emerged from the mentioned investigation. In particular, we emphasise the future importance of subject-specific courses and the need to complement conventional monolingual courses with courses that enhance participants' ability to integrate different languages within the same setting. We

offer an outline of a pilot intervention project that draws on some of the findings from the investigation, namely a semester-long four-language course *Kommunikationstraining im mehrsprachigen Umfeld*, and conclude with a few questions for practice and research.

The Language Centre as promoter of multilingualism

Like the cantons which it primarily serves, German is historically the principal language at the University of Basel. Other languages are present by virtue of the plurilingualism of staff and students. Institutionally, multilingualism is evident in joint courses with other universities that use different languages of instruction, such as the Masters in Law, offered in collaboration with the University of Geneva. In addition to these networks, institutional multilingualism is also evident in the form of marked anglicisation on all levels. Recently amended University of Basel regulations regarding the language of instruction for example stipulate: 'Die hauptsächlichen Unterrichtssprachen sind Deutsch und Englisch' (§ 14 Studierenden-Ordnung der Universität Basel 2011). It is increasingly assumed that students are sufficiently proficient in English to consult publications and even follow lectures or submit written work. Depending on the discipline, this may already happen on the Bachelor's level. Some Master's and PhD courses are mainly or exclusively conducted in English.

The Language Centre serves the university community by enhancing their language competences for academic and professional environments and participation in societal processes. In addition to three of the national languages Italian, French and German, it offers courses in major lingua Franca languages such as English and Spanish, so-called small and medium-sized languages such as Swedish and Dutch, and languages that are crucial for communication between Europe and other parts of the world, such as Arabic, Chinese and Swahili. The courses range from general academic language courses with integrated professional skills (such as *Deutsch als Studiersprache*), to subject-specific courses (such as *Italiano per medicina*) and courses that are more or less loosely integrated into departmental curricula or timetables (such as *English for Scientists in Sports*). The Language Centre also prepares students and staff for commercial language exams, such as the *Diplôme approfondi de langue française* (DALF) and Cambridge exams, such as the *International Legal English Certificate*. In addition, it offers a tandem consultation and partnering service. Whilst each of the courses taken on their own is conceived largely monolingually, participants often take courses in different languages to enhance their plurilingual repertoires. This contributes to the multilingual profile of the University, the professional organisations in which students will be employed, and the social institutions in which they will exercise their citizenship rights and duties.

The mixed methods study: quantitative and qualitative data

The mixed methods study used a range of quantitative and qualitative datasets. These combined to give insights into synchronic and diachronic patterns regarding large groups, which are enriched by interviews that offer detailed first person perspectives. Statistics from a survey with 740 respondents gives the following picture. Most respondents (68.5%) had German (including Swiss German) as a first language, followed by French (5.5%) and Italian (4.5%) as first languages. Collectively, they reported having knowledge (defined as A1 and higher) of 42 languages, including Catalan, Estonian, Kurdish, Turkish and Russian. Forty per cent of respondents indicated that they have knowledge of four languages, the most common of



Matthäus Merian, *Topographia Helvetiae, Rhaetiae et Valesiae*, 1654.

What are the specific contributions that institutions of higher learning can make in societies which value the promotion of pluri- and multilingualism?

which came from the following group: German, English, French, Spanish and Italian. More females than males were enrolled, (62% were women, compared to 55% women students in the University as a whole). The academic levels of respondents correlated to those in the University at large: 53.8% were on the Bachelor's level, followed by Masters/Licentiate (32.8%) and PhD students (12.7%). Concerning faculties, the biggest group of students (22.4%) come from the Social Sciences and Humanities; followed by the Natural Sciences (21.1%). In terms of course registrations, the most popular languages for the period first semester 2003 to first semester 2012, were English (with 5180 registrations), Spanish (with 2193 registrations), German as a Foreign Language (with 1947 registrations), French (with 1888 registrations) and Italian (with 1277 registrations). Over the years there has been a growth in the number of courses and registrations in the different languages. In the first semester 2003, eight languages were taught in 17 courses; by the first semester of 2012, the number of languages had more than doubled to 18 and the number of courses had multiplied more than six times to 114. Likewise, the number of subject-specific courses on offer has also grown. This started with 5 in the first semester of 2003, attracting 39 students. By the first semester of 2012 this had grown to 14 courses with a total of 136 registrations.

Reflecting the difficulties associated with balancing quality and quantity, 90.8% of respondents reported that they strive for correctness, while 82.5% prioritised the number of languages spoken irrespective of the level. In 73.1% of the cases, these were the same respondents who prioritise both level and number of languages. Asked whether their competence in the languages they knew had improved or deteriorated while at university, 45% of respondents reported that their English had rather improved. In contrast, as far as French is concerned, the biggest group (34%) reported that their competence had rather deteriorated. The same applied to Italian, with the biggest group (23%) also reporting that their competence had rather deteriorated. A first corpus of semi-structured qualitative interviews with Master's students concentrated on their experience of pluri- and multilingualism at university and their expectations regarding pluri- and multilingualism after university. Some of the points made by these students included:

- 'In the business world, like in nursing, one must be able to express oneself, exchange ideas, somehow reach a consensus – that in different languages'
- 'For me the motivation is actually, I want to know more. So I want to be able to experience more or speak better with other people from other countries, other cultures. [...] And certainly, employment opportunities are better. [...] It is easier to go and work in another country for example. Or to work along in a project where the project leader only speaks English or only French. Also within Switzerland.'

- 'At school I really enjoyed French and actually it annoys me that I've quite lost it. [...] In Law, it was necessary to read a Federal ruling in French maybe once. But this, one rather avoids. So, one can wriggle out of it extremely well. [...] I had a job interview with the Federal administration and there [...] it is extremely strongly emphasised that French is so important.'

These and additional utterances not cited here confirmed that for many interviewees:

- Pluri- and multilingualism are highly regarded.
- Mastering academic language is more demanding than everyday language, possibly even including language in many work contexts. Thus a minimum level of C1 offers a viable starting point to read academic literature. Initially this may require some word-for-word translation, but through learning by doing, the content rather than the language will gradually become the main focus. A level below C1 is a considerable obstacle to effective comprehension of academic texts.
- Languages that may be important after studies may not coincide with languages that are important during studies. So, whereas English tends to have a pivotal position as a language of research and instruction, other languages that are neglected in higher education institutions (such as French or Spanish) may also be important, or even more important, in the workplace.

A second corpus of interviews sought to gain insight into the broader language biographies of a relatively privileged group of young people who are extremely plurilingual. These language biographies covered a longer timespan (sometimes extending to the language portfolios of grandparents) and extended beyond educational institutions and prospective employment. Three groups were examined, each correlating to one of the focus areas of linguistic intervention associated with internationalisation, mobility and integration in higher education. The three groups comprised: local Swiss who have (Swiss) German as a first language; Swiss from other parts of Switzerland who do not have German as a first language; and international students who do not have German as a first language. This reflected

three of the Language Centre's target communities: local nationals who are learning non-local languages to enhance their language portfolios in view of envisaged future mobility in the form of study and/or work in other parts of Switzerland and/or abroad; already mobile Swiss nationals from other parts of the country who are learning the local language (German) and for whom improvement of an additional national language is the major concern; and students from abroad who have been recruited in terms of the international orientation of the University who are learning the local language in order to integrate into local everyday life.

Unsurprisingly, most of the interviewees had been exposed to a range of languages and/or multilingual settings at an early age, be that because of family constellations, school, or migration. Whilst they underscored their instrumental value for study and work, these interviewees took more than a utilitarian attitude to languages. They also foregrounded the significance of:

- Expressing oneself in a different symbolic system
- The emotional associations with and value of different languages
- Encounters with and understanding amongst people
- Integration into and belonging to local, national and transnational communities.

Some of these views transpire from utterances about pluri- and multilingualism such as:

- 'When you have another language you don't simply have the translation – you have another culture, other ways of expressing. [...] So if I'm learning another language, it's as if I'm building another life.'
- Spanish is 'also very important to me for sentimental reasons. [...] It's] more about me than a career or profession.'
- 'If you're able to communicate in the language that the general public knows, you're in sync.'

Overall, different parts of the study confirmed that students' attitudes to the degrees of compartmentalisation amongst different languages are a critical issue (Meyer *et al.*, 2012). On the one hand, respondents reported that they perceive a correlation between language barriers and knowledge barriers. Thus in their studies

they mostly restricted themselves to one or two languages and they hardly ever sourced knowledge or experience from the many additional languages they know. Also related to this, some respondents reported that they found it difficult to move easily between languages where such flexibility is required. On the other hand, some interviewees expressed the fear that they slip too easily between languages, that they are unable to police what they perceive as required borders between languages and that this jeopardises expectations regarding linguistic purity. In view of these concerns, respondents were asked if they 'would be interested in a course offering the possibility to use and learn two or more languages in the same context (for e.g. conferences, meetings)'. To this question 45.7% responded that they would. These findings became a central consideration in the conceptualisation of the course *Kommunikationstraining im mehrsprachigen Umfeld*.

A four-language course: *Kommunikationstraining im mehrsprachigen Umfeld*

An increasingly common though reductionist notion of multilingualism in higher education is that this consists of the use of English as a lingua franca in non-English institutions, i.e. L1 + English. This narrow view contrasts with the broader approach that all Europeans should be competent in their first language plus two additional ones. The broader perception constitutes the background to the four-language course *Kommunikationstraining im mehrsprachigen Umfeld* that was piloted by the Language Centre in 2012. The target languages are two of the Swiss national languages, namely French and Italian, in addition to English as a lingua franca. German serves as a background language, used for some organisational and administrative purposes. Participants are expected to have a level of at least C1 in at least one of the languages; at least B2 in a second language; and at least A2 in the third. It is assumed that they have sufficient knowledge of German to understand administrative arrangements.

Amongst other things, the course seeks to:

- Immerse participants in task-based communication in multilingual settings commonly found in academic, professional, and societal interactions
- Further enhance the value participants ascribe to multilingualism by giving them various opportunities to experience successful communicative interaction across languages
- Nudge participants to step out of their comfort zones and take risks in languages in which they feel less confident
- Improve the facility with which speakers code-switch where possible and helpful
- Practise sticking to one language where this is necessary.

The course is offered by a team of multilingual lecturers. Each lecturer is responsible for one of the course languages that is also a first language for him/her. A script consisting of thematically clustered multimedia dossiers focusses on the following topics: *Felicità/Happiness; Santé et nutrition/Health and nutrition; Aide humanitaire sans frontières/Aiuti umanitari senza frontiere; La visione e la visualizzazione delle idee/*

Vision and the visualisation of ideas; and a simulation of an international EXPO. Each two-hour workshop of the thirteen-hour course includes activities in all three of the target languages, with two of these given priority in each session on a rotation basis. While some tasks train students' ability to remain in one language, others require that they source materials in several languages, discuss them in two languages and produce written and oral output in two or three languages.

In each workshop a brief grammar section introduces the language that would be used for a task-based, often collaboratively produced, written communicative act. For example, in the *Felicità/Happiness* workshop, following the viewing of a trailer for a documentary on happiness (German/English) and an interview with an academic who researches happiness (Italian), participants' use of the grammar of questions in French and Italian is refreshed. Participants are then divided into project groups and given the task of compiling a questionnaire whose aim it is to raise awareness amongst potential interviewees regarding the various dimensions of happiness in their lives and the significance they ascribe to it. In addition to class-time, participants have to submit homework and do self-study as further requirements for receiving credit points. The series of workshops culminates in an EXPO Basilea. During this event, groups of students give an oral presentation in three languages using media and strategies of their choice to support the understanding of an audience with different levels of competence in different languages. In addition, simulating a poster session at a conference, they display and talk to an academic poster they have prepared in two languages.

Course evaluation of the first two semesters suggests that the multilingual course setting fosters collaboration among participants and lecturers with divergent levels in different languages, creates cross-lingual awareness, enhances flexilingualism, and is perceived as an invaluable asset in the regular academic course schedule.

Final comment

Taking the University of Basel as an example, this survey of ongoing interventions and investigations sought to enhance the visibility of a variety of pluri- and multilingualisms at one higher education institution in a multilingual society. The survey also gives a taste of the extent to which students in particular value pluri- and multilingualism. And it gives a flavour of some of the growing active systematic measures that staff, students and Language Centres at higher education institutions take to promote pluri- and multilingualism in individuals, institutions, and society. Foreseen follow-up publications will each focus on a specific part of the investigation. These will provide and discuss additional data, and venture possible explanations for the findings.

This initial investigation raises many questions for further inquiry and suggest avenues of possible debate and intervention. This includes issues such as:

- What are the still insufficiently examined assumptions and effects pertaining to language associated with the promotion of mobility and the internationalisation of higher education?
- What are the specific contributions that institutions of higher learning can make in societies which value the promotion of pluri- and multilingualism?

Finally, the overview also confirms the contribution that Language Centres at higher education institutions that take their mandate seriously can make as sites of instruction, intervention, and academic inquiry.

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Stephan Meyer

co-ordinates the English programme at the University of Basel Language Centre.

Petra Gekeler

directs the Language Centre at the University of Basel.

Daniela Urank

is a co-researcher in the multilingual project team at the University of Basel Language Centre and Lecturer of English.

Basturkmen, H. (2012). Review of research into the correspondence between language teachers' stated beliefs and practices. *System* 40(2), pp. 282-295

In this survey article Helen Basturkmen asks the question as to how foreign language teachers' beliefs are concretized in their teaching practice. The research was carried out because the author had concluded that the outcomes of research in this area are often contradictory. Some studies show a correspondence between beliefs and teaching practices, whereas other studies demonstrate that teacher beliefs do not agree with their teaching practices.

It is generally assumed that foreign language teachers' beliefs impact on their teaching practice (Borg, 2011)¹. This has a double effect: beliefs impact on actions and experiences impact on beliefs. However, there are several reasons why beliefs and practices often do not correspond. There are also methodological considerations according to Basturkmen, but they will not be addressed here because they are not unequivocal.

Context factors can prevent teachers from putting certain beliefs into practice. A teacher might find it important to use the target language in his/her classroom as the language of communication, but not do this, because it is not common practice in his/her school. Secondly, the teachers' learning process itself plays an important role. It is possible that teachers' beliefs do change, but that these changes are not yet visible in their teaching practice. A third factor may be that a teacher may have different conflicting belief systems at the same time. Beliefs on

the use of the target language may conflict with beliefs about how students learn.

For her survey article Basturkmen restricted her research to studies that appeared between 2000 and 2008. The studies had to include the term *beliefs* and be aimed at beliefs teachers are able to formulate explicitly, so-called *stated beliefs*. At the same time she wished to find out in how far beliefs corresponded to, respectively differed from classroom practices. This resulted in seventeen studies, six of which showed clear correspondences between beliefs and practices and eleven with only a partial correspondence. The studies show that the following factors play a significant role when certain beliefs are put into practice or are not implemented: *context*, the teacher's *experience* and *lesson planning*. The context can prevent a teacher from putting his/her ideas into practice. It may be related to the school culture, the demands of the curriculum and the role of colleagues. Basturkmen points out that, in some cases, context factors are also used as an excuse for not putting certain beliefs into practice.

The studies that showed a correspondence between beliefs and teaching practices attributed this to the teacher's experience and/or his/her lesson planning. Experienced teachers showed a higher degree of correspondence between beliefs and teaching practice than less experienced teachers. Basturkmen gives two explanations for this phenomenon: firstly, beliefs that a teacher has held for a longer period of time are more likely to be put into practice than more recent beliefs. The beliefs of beginning teachers are of more recent date. Secondly, experience is likely to impact

on beliefs. Beliefs that are formed by experience during teaching practice will, for obvious reasons, correspond with teaching practice. Beginning teachers have less experience and therefore, fewer beliefs based on experience.

When lessons were planned, there was a higher correspondence between beliefs and practices, for instance when selecting a specific type of instruction, designing tasks or choosing assignments for the students. A few studies looked into unplanned events during the lesson, such as giving grammatical feedback. These studies showed that with experienced teachers, beliefs and practices corresponded, whereas this was not the case with beginning teachers.

The survey article concerns a limited number of studies, the majority of which shows a limited correspondence between beliefs and practices. It is hard to draw clear conclusions on the basis of these studies. A possible conclusion is that explicit beliefs may have an impact on certain planned activity in teaching practice and that these may be useful points of departure for initial and in-service teacher education.

¹ Borg, S. (2011). The impact of in-service education on language teachers' beliefs. *System* 39 (3), pp. 370-380.

Machteld Moonen

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