

Call to contributions

4th European Conference on Plurilingualism

18, 19 and 20 May 2016

PLURILINGUALISM AND CREATIVITY

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Introduction

The European Conference on plurilingualism is organised by the European Observatory of Plurilingualism. It is an three-yearly event gathering public and private decision-makers, researchers and civil society actors, executives in economic, social, professional and educational fields and ordinary citizens, to ask clear questions about linguistic matters in political, cultural, economical and social fields. The first Conference was held in Paris on 24-25 October 2005, the second Conference in Berlin on 18-19 June 2009, and the third in Rome on 11-13 October 2012.

1. ARGUMENTS

The 4th Conference will follow the same model as the former ones.

The Assises have practical objectives. The analyses of the researchers, decision makers and the civil society must lead to conclusions allowing practical decisions and evolutions.

In Rome, the general theme had been “Languages without frontiers : plurilingualism”. The theme of these Assises, “Plurilingualism and creativity”, is the natural following.

This choice must be justified.

First of all, the objective is not to treat creativity as such, as there is a lot of literature on the subject, but to treat creative processes linked to plurilingualism and to linguistic and cultural diversity.

We do not have a restricted view of creativity, too often associated with fashion, design and advertising. All human activities are potentially creative. To be creative, one must break from eternal repetition, bring something that will alter the order of things.

Language is the ideal area where creativity uses words, concepts, metaphors and all language effects and games.

What happens when languages come into contact ?

It would be rather naive to believe that linguistic interaction is naturally fair, on the contrary it is naturally asymmetrical.

During the Assises in 2005, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas presented the thesis according to which “when “big” languages are learned subtractively (at the cost of the mother tongue) rather than additively (in addition to mother tongues), they become killer languages”.¹

The ambition of the Assises is to show that plurilingualism cannot be taken for granted in a European universe created in the conjunction of State, people, nation and language, a conjunction which is in reality more of an exception than a reality. The development of plurilingualism would suppose in the European context to overturn numerous assumptions and to be creative.

Linguistic diversity and plurilingualism are a reality of the world, a complete part of biodiversity, as stressed by UNESCO (2001 Declaration on cultural diversity). We must learn to think in terms of diversity and not only of universality.

Thus the OEP is interested in the diversity of languages but also in their interactions connected with technical evolutions. Globalisation provokes a degree of interaction unknown until now, leading to the massive disappearance of little used languages and to effects of domination between languages without precedent.

Having overcome this initial problem and taken the measure of its issues, we associate plurilingualism and creativity as much in the process as in the conditions allowing it, variety being the “raw material of life”.

Following a well established tradition at the OEP, we wish to approach the matter along four lines : political, educational, cultural and political.

Politics

We place under this heading anything concerning the European and international institutions.

The European Union is a political union with no equivalent in the history of humanity, it cannot be linked with any category of constitutional law. Therefore it raises unique potential governance problems.

¹ *Plurilinguisme, interculturalité et emploi : défis pour l'Europe*, OEP, L'Harmattan, 2009, p.105

Neither state, nor federation, nor confederation, but still exercising a strong influence on our daily life, it is quite normal that in a democratic context it should give birth to a new model of citizenship that supplements –without superseding them – the national citizenships thus implying the need for a new democratic model.

Beyond its purely operative aspects involving the election of the members of European Parliament and taking part in the election of the president of the European Commission, one might wonder about the cultural, linguistic and institutional conditions to be fulfilled to allow a real expression of a European citizenship whose emergence is real. Today there is a long way to go. Restrained democracy or real democracy ? Is rampant monolingualism compatible with a real involvement of the European peoples and with the democratic control of political power ? This is the first wording that we can give of the first thematic line of the Brussels Assises.

This aspect should not be separated from its context, globalisation, which leads to a deep crisis of democracy and citizenship. Should the market replace democracy ?

The centres of powers have shifted. The powerlessness of governments and parliaments cause a deep crisis of representativeness. The centres of power have shifted outside and inside the States. The judgment *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* by the United States Supreme Court on 21 January 2010, allowing corporate financial participation to election campaigns, in the name of freedom of speech, is in this respect an historical judgement. Besides, the independence of the media is today relative.

Europe is secretly engaged in a commercial negotiation aiming no less at the dissolution of Europe into an “Atlantic domestic market” whose effect will be to remove even further the centres of decision and to abandon the idea of an independent Europe. We are on the razor’s edge.

This leads to the populations feeling dispossessed of the power they thought they had acquired through universal suffrage.

In this general context lies the linguistic fight. Plurilingualism is in itself a great political and democratic issue. Seen from the outside, languages are clearly an issue of power, political domination having linguistic domination as a corollary. But the issue is also inside. Is English for all a tool of subjection or of emancipation ? The matter lies at the heart of all controversies whereas monolingualism is slowly progressing.

Is multilingualism or plurilingualism the DNA of Europe, as Androulla Vassiliou, former commissioner for education and culture, audiovisual sector and multilingualism, said or is it only an alibi against all-English ?

Do we have a clear vision of the state of languages in the functioning of the institutions ? No real statistics have been published by the European Commission. Are we able to check that the regulation 58/1 establishing the linguistic regime of the European Union is enforced and how ? We are not.

Only an indirect analysis allows us to say that about 70% of the texts published by the European Commission are in English and are not translated. All the legal texts, representing about 10% of the whole, being translated into the 24 official languages, it means that 80% of the texts concerning the information of the citizens are in English. Democracy should allow access to information to the citizen but this right to information is actually mostly theoretical when information is not available in the citizen's language.

Plurilingualism is certainly not the only condition to restore the citizen's rights but it is a fundamental condition.

Many topics are thus open to discussion.

Education and research

Plurilingualism is a challenge for education where plurilingualism means the teaching of foreign languages from nursery school to higher education.

Formerly a simple part of general knowledge, languages have become a matter of competence as much as a way to discover the world and achieve personal fulfilment.

Influenced by the migrations, the general problem of language learning takes new dimensions. The languages spoken in the family circles become a capital to be protected, an individual and collective asset for the host country, an open door to the school language and to academic success, and an important factor in social integration.

Recent research shows the dynamic effects of the interaction between the *school language* and the *mother tongue* and the intellectual and behavioural effects of bilingualism and plurilingualism on children. Bilingualism is often seen as a disadvantage but it can be an asset, though it meets even today strong resistance at school and in the family circle.

As regards pedagogy, many tools have been provided to facilitate language teaching in a plurilingual and intercultural perspective, particularly in the European Centre for Modern Languages.

Learning the national language being a prerequisite, the themes likely to be treated in the education field are numerous :

- assessment of personal skills ;
- assessment of educational systems ;
- assessment of educational linguistic policies ;
- early language learning vs. school learning ;
- diversification of languages taught at school ;
- regional and minority languages at school ;
- school learning of the languages spoken in the family circle ;
- integration of language learning in a global, plurilingual and intercultural approach ;

- necessary interaction between linguistic learning and other subjects.

All these problems have been discussed during the former Assises. They can be further explored. Nevertheless the matter of curricula should be particularly stressed as it is essential to the implementation of the diversifying strategies of linguistic teaching.

Are we condemned to the model widely dominant in Europe of an inverted pyramid, everything starting with English and ending with a very limited diversity ? Could we promote another model, starting with a discovery of the diversity of languages, then two languages, ending with a diversification in high school and college ? We will compare our experiences and open up some lines of discussion.

It is difficult to discuss together the matters concerning nursery schools and higher education. Nevertheless an educational linguistic policy must be based on a global strategy.

Besides, higher education is more than any level of education faced with globalisation, and this situation creates specific problems.

Finally, research faces its own problems, creating three imperatives :

- aptitude to work in international teams and to cooperate with teams in other countries ;
- dissemination towards the scientific community and the general public ;
- production which must be differentiated from dissemination.

These issues have led to a recommendation of the 11th Assembly of the Conference of the presidents of higher education schools of Germany on 22 November 2011. More recently, the annual general Assembly of the European Federation of national linguistic institutions, held on 24 September 2014, adopted the Florence resolution on the use of languages in teaching and research in universities, this resolution being published in twenty languages.

Besides, the Lombardy administrative court invalidated the decision of the Milan Polytechnic Institute that imposed English as the sole teaching language at Master's level. The recitals of the ruling and their consequences deserve further examination.

Article 2 of the law on higher education and research presented by Geneviève Fioraso was adopted by the French Parliament on 22 July 2013 after much debate in the press and in the Parliament during which the OEP was particularly active. The conditions of application and all the implications of this legal text must be examined.

The propositions of contributions will have to fit into this general framework, but could, if need be, propose other lines of research that could complement the others.

Culture

In her introduction to *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*², Barbara Cassin, quoting Wilhelm von Humbolt, notes that “language manifests itself in reality only as multiplicity”

² *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*, Seuil, 2004.

and explains that “ the plurality of languages is far from being reduced to a plurality of ways to name a thing : they are different perspectives of this same thing and when the thing is not an object of the senses, there are often as many things designed by each”.

In the unlimited field of culture, in relation with creativity, we cannot adopt a purely descriptive attitude as in the well known UNESCO definition.

Moreover we would like to deal with creativity in the cultural sphere only in relation with languages.

If we take the line of Barbara Cassin’s introduction, we can see that multiplicity is intrinsic to language and that internal linguistic creativity is an everyday phenomenon.

But this phenomenon also manifests itself between languages through plurilingualism.

To tackle this issue, we propose some lines of reflection, more to open up avenues than to deal with the whole subject.

What kind of relations bind the artist with his original culture ? Doesn’t the artist, when in contact with his work and communities or artists, create his own culture ? Doesn’t the migrating artist take root in several lands ? Can the artist building up his singular visions create without soil ? Is it possible to create in a *lingua franca* ? Isn’t the writer the creator of his own language, thus contributing to the creation of the language in which he writes and to the enrichment of the body of knowledge ?

It is less known that the writer is often himself plurilingual and pluricultural, he sometimes writes works of different nature in several languages, or in one language only but with elements of other languages. Finally, he may use several languages in the same work. In all cases, language is narrowly linked to the personal history of the author.

Translation, the language of the future, is of course an essential factor, in two ways. It leads to the diffusion of the works which are received in different cultures. At the same time, the translator, a key actor of the diffusion and reception, plays a role in the creation. Thus the relationships between translating and creating through translation could be explored.

Plurilingualism in its different manifestations is essential in the process of creation.

Contacts between languages are ambivalent. Until now we voluntarily adopted a positive approach but there is no necessity to stick to it. The cultural and linguistic transfers are complex, always asymmetrical but never unilateral. The Cuban Fernando Ortiz forged in 1940 the concept of “transculturation”, more complex and explicit than “acculturation” to explain intercultural interactions.

Reflection on plurilingualism and creativity in art can extend to all the areas of culture and cultural industries and applies thus to cinema, theatre, design and architecture, fashion and advertising...

The fight to protect and promote diversity of cultural expressions is multifaceted and essential.

Economics

Economy structures cultures and includes the whole diversity of cultural expressions. Economism on the contrary changes all cultures into pure trading goods.

In all economic activities there is an irreducible cultural dimension.

Economy is a privileged area for expressing creativity. Joseph Schumpeter saw in long-term growth a process of “creative destruction” whose mainspring is innovation, multifaceted innovation :

- New markets, new opportunities, new products and equipments ;
- New job opportunities, new sources of raw materials, new logistical means ;
- new forms of organisation and management, new financial means ;
- new marketing and advertising methods, new means of communication ;
- legal changes and new ways to influence the political decision-makers, new means of fraud.

Our aim is to show that, in the heart of the different layers of growth that should be extended to the whole economic and social development, there is a linguistic and cultural dimension that every decision-maker and manager should be able to take into account.

In every system, be it monolingual or multilingual, there are costs and benefits, both apparent and hidden, that should be brought to light. Our fundamental intuition is nevertheless that there are many benefits to be found in an efficient treatment of languages in the corporate world, benefits for the workers and for the companies.

- How to problematise the linguistic factor in decision making ?
- What tools exist or should exist to help decisions, not only linguistic decisions but also managerial decisions with linguistic aspects (participative management, ethical charter, training, communication, customer management, marketing, project management, risk management, etc.) ?
- What would be the impact of the quality of language in the firm, considering that the firm often has its own technical language ?
- How much weight has the terminology in the normalisation of a professional language for the management and a good communication inside the company ?
- What would be the tools for the managers, or even the staff, to help them evaluate assets and liabilities in their daily work ?

These are a few lines to be explored, drawing from accumulated materials or personal experiences, with the will to address not other researchers but the managers and above all their trainers who are daily facing situations where language and linguistic knowledge is required.

In reality, trainings in management have tended to put aside general knowledge, considering that it was the business of high school. Today this trend is being reversed on the grounds that managing people requires a lot of general knowledge and a little technique. Knowledge on

language and intercultural relations is part of the humanities, while being badly included in what we call general knowledge.

2. PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

1. Place and date

The Conference will be hosted by the European institutions on 18, 19 and 20 May 2016.

2. Application

Form : A summary of one page with a bibliography will be asked first on the subscription form attached.

This form will be submitted to a selection committee. The candidate will be informed of the decision taken (see [key dates](#)).

3. The linguistic regulation will be as follows :

The **oral presentation** will have to be given in one of the official languages of the Conference : English, French, German and Italian. As for the interpretation regime, it is planned to have an interpretation in each of these official languages. According to the circumstances, the organisers may decide to adopt a limited regime of whose conditions the speakers will be informed in due time.

Whatever the language used, communications accompanied by a video-projection presentation will have to be done in another language than the language used orally and chosen among the four languages accepted for oral presentations.

4. Publication and editorial charter

The language for the written paper is chosen by the speaker. Summaries for publication will be 15 lines long at the most and handed at the same time as the entire text and translated in at least two languages among the five following ones : English, French, German, Italian and Spanish.

The presentation will be presented in an argumentative manner and will include an analysis of the situation, a presentation of the problem, if possible supported by experiences and precise cases, and concrete proposals.

A style sheet or model will be sent to the selected candidates.

The accepted presentations will be a complete six-page text, with a maximum of 18,000 characters, spaces included, summaries and bibliographies included, according to the following format aimed at the paper or electronic publication :

Text format : A4 paper, Times New Roman 10, lateral margins : 4.25; top margin : 5; bottom margin : 4.7; file format : .doc or .odt **AND** .pdf (there is a necessity to get the original non-modifiable text)

Notes at the end of the article:

The notes will have to be endnotes, not footnotes. When they are bibliographical notes, the official norms will have to be followed. (<http://revues.refer.org/telechargement/fiche-bibliographie.pdf>).

5. Oral Presentations

The oral presentations are part of round-tables lasting 20 minutes being reserved for exchanges with the public.

The time given for oral presentations is strictly limited to 9 minutes, unless otherwise decided by the organisers.

The entire texts being published before the event (see [key dates](#)), the oral communication must not be the reading of the written paper. On the contrary, the most significant elements will have to be extracted.

All overrun of time would infringe on the time kept for questions from the audience, there is a need to keep to this strict discipline on which the moderator will keep an eye.

Application form : here enclosed to fill in and send back as attachment by email at

assisesplurilinguisme@neuf.fr

6. Written papers

As for the entire text : in order to nurture as best as possible the round-tables, the integral texts of the presentations will be published on the website of the EOP before the event. They have to be sent by email as an attachment to : assisesplurilinguisme@neuf.fr

7. Key dates

- Transmission of the call for contributions : between 30 June and 30 July 2015
- Deadline for the application form : 15 October 2015
- Announcement of the selection result for the presentations : 20 December 2015
- Payment of the special membership OEP Conference : 31 March 2016
- Deadline for the sending of the entire text and translated summary : 30 April 2016

8. Financial details

A special membership for the OEP Conference of 130 € per person (30 € for students) should be paid before 31 March 2016 by one of the following means :

- by cheque written to OEP (address : 3 rue Segond, 94300 Vincennes)
- by bank transfer to OEP :

(IBAN : FR42 2004 1000 0157 5110 3E02 094; BIC : PSSTFRPPPAR)

- by secure payment via Paypal

We call your attention to the fact that no payment will be accepted onsite. The participants will receive a badge and a participant's folder at the reception desk.

9. Costs borne by EOP

The EOP will pay the costs of the coffee breaks and the three onsite lunches on the Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, and of the Acts of the Conference that will be published in the "Cahiers de l'OEP". All other expenses will be paid by the participants.