

Language, culture, mobility and citizenship

Europe faces a major difficulty.

The building of a new Europe, initiated by the treaties of Rome, has up to now enjoyed a presumption of legitimacy from the citizens of the member countries.

Yet, successive expansions and globalization have gradually altered its nature.

The French-German reconciliation, the true underlying myth of Europe, still as powerful and legitimate, no longer suffices and lies within the more general context of the relations of all the member countries with the rest of the world and, particularly, when it comes to the countries from the former Soviet bloc, of their relations with Russia.

Moreover, because of globalization, European countries are subject to economic and social pressures but also to a strong cultural pressure which brings them to search for a common identity, beyond their own identities.

The language question is at the core of these problematics.

The European Union is a major innovation in the modern world. Never before has such a large group of countries tried to unite, without giving up whatsoever of their own identities, to share a common fate, with the same pursuit of peace, freedom and development.

The language question too is a novel issue.

Languages are indeed inseparable from the cultures with which they are totally interwoven in their development and vitality. A language is not an instrument, it is not just a tool, as some would have it, it is a life environment. It is also the very condition of free speech.

Because a language partakes of the dynamics of individual and collective identities, it is a component of citizenship.

It is Europe's duty to take up this tremendous challenge which consists in respecting all the languages and in facilitating the horizontal circulation of ideas, values and imaginaries.

The issue of languages in the functioning of the European institutions and in their relations with the citizens must be posed, for it comes under the symbolic power and is directly related to the exercise of citizenship.

Plurilinguism is therefore one of the foundations of the emergence of a European citizenship which is an addition, and not a substitution, to national citizenships.

Offers of contributions will have to fit in with these various problems - languages, cultures, mobility, citizenship - to discuss them, clarify them, complete them, put them in perspective. They will have to be at the confluence of multiple subjects, from cognitive sciences to political sciences and philosophy.

Towards a plurilingual education

More than twenty years ago, at the core of the reflections on language teaching, Europe stressed the necessity for Europeans to master at least two foreign languages in addition to their mother tongue.

This principle was set down by the Council of Ministers of Education of 1984 (Europe being then the Europe of the Twelve).

It was later taken up again in the resolution of the European Council of February 14, 2002, on the promotion of linguistic diversity and learning of languages, then by the Barcelona European Council of March 15 and 16, 2002, which demand that an action be taken to improve the mastering of basic skills, particularly by teaching at least two foreign languages from an early age.

Although those declarations were without ambiguity, they gave rise to various interpretations.

Save that the age for first learning a foreign language has been lowered, a fact by which only the English language benefited, few educational policies have been so far developed, aiming at the realisation of objective 1+2, which the OEP calls 1+2⁺ in order to establish a true European plurilinguism and to signify that it implies **at least** two languages in addition to the mother tongue,

When proposing the concept of "adoptive personal language", the Maalouf report brought no really novel element in the relation with the position taken in the European Chart for Plurilinguism. By this concept, the good point was that the report at least underlined the necessity to offer for at least one foreign language other than the language chosen as the international language, "which is not necessarily English", a status at least equivalent to that of the international language. Thus it brought the pattern 1+2 out of the vagueness of the various interpretations which, up to now, have helped confirm a tendency for a polarization on English and the correlative marginalization of the other languages.

The Education, Youth and Culture Council of November 21, 2008 draws to a large extent the conclusions from the report by recommending:

- to try to provide young people- from an early age, in general education and in vocational and higher education - with a varied and top quality selection of language and culture courses which will enable them to acquire a command of at least two foreign languages, which constitutes a factor of integration into the society of knowledge.
- to try to broaden the range of languages taught at different levels of education - including recognized languages which are less widely used, in order to enable the students to make a selection while taking into account their personal interests or geographical situation.

The European Union only having a competence of encouragement in the field of education, a resolution of the Council of the Ministers having therefore no restricting power, the national governments who signed this text remain in control of their decisions, including taking steps contrary to the spirit and the letter of the text.

The 2nd European conference on Plurilinguism will therefore aim at developing answers to the question of knowing which are the possible ways of reaching the objective 1+2⁺ while taking into account the diversity of educational systems and the multiplicity of possible strategies.

Researchers and officials in charge of educational policies are invited to take stock of their research and to compare their respective experience from a concrete and operational point of view.

Considering the extent of the subject and the particularly strategic character of primary and secondary education, contributions will be limited to this sole aspect. Higher Education and Continuing Education will be treated in another context.

Languages within companies' strategies and professional relations

Language and languages make their entrance in the lives of companies under pressure from numerous factors linked to the internationalisation of economy. The problematics are varied and combine according to the characteristics of the companies.

Beyond the general objectives as they are set by educational policies and curriculum, the questions become: why, how, how many, how far, in terms of which characteristics of the companies, of their size, their markets, their technologies, their partners etc...

The choice of a linguistic policy depends on a multitude of parameters and on the mobilization of a piece of information, which, unlike the theories of the pure and perfect market, is by nature imperfect and exposed to subjectivity

Four dimensions

Four main dimensions can be distinguished

An *internal dimension* which concerns communication at all levels, in relations of hierarchy and collaboration, inside the company. Good comprehension and quickness at transmitting messages and information is the determining factor. A company has its own culture, concepts, rules, behaviours which express themselves in the language and are the very basis of communication and collective creation. Everything is important. The language in general and the language of the company in particular which plays the part of specialist language, are at the core of the cohesion and efficiency of the company. Language is a component of security, as pointed out by some recent affairs. And language takes up a place all the more central in this observation as the company is composed of employees of various nationalities at the different levels of its organization.

If the company engages in extensions by setting up new implantations, by means of alliances or acquisitions, the problem gets more important but its nature remains the same.

In *its external dimension*, the language finds itself in the middle of the relation of the company with its market(s) - a Japanese minister recently declared that the language of business is the language of the client -, with suppliers and partners at the various levels of the chain, from the planning department to the distribution department. Is a language a means of conquering markets, what is its weight in negotiations?

The *third dimension* is that of governance. Must the company have one policy or several policies, central policies or policies varying with each country, cultural sphere,, product, technology etc? Must the policy be aggressive, have consequences on recruitment, on training or is it the result of haphazard recruitments, whatever the level? Must the language of the company be that of its executives or must the latter adopt the company and its language?

The *fourth dimension* is that of coherence between individual choices and collective optimum.

Just to make the question even more complex than it already seems, it should be added that the micro-economic approach is not enough. Everyone knows that the addition of individual choices - the choices of individuals or those of companies - does not define collective interest. The company is immersed in a culture, and even in several cultures which determine considerably its performance as a company.. This is, by the way, one of the fundamental parameters which an international company takes into account for its choices of implantation or which, on the contrary a local community will underline to attract foreign investors. Language skills are, without doubt, one of its essential components.

Need for a strategic analysis

One can think that today a language becomes an important factor of the business efficiency and of the quality of its professional relations. It therefore deserves particular attention.

Here are some of the questions posed to the company desirous of working out a strategy in the matter of languages.

This strategic analysis has to be carried out today. Some large companies did it. There is no doubt that a lot of companies wonder about the economic value of a language and of languages for them, when that field had been up to now foreign for them. This is understandable since competence or language skills have an influence on their achievements and since they are themselves a source of expenses assessed in remunerations and in training courses and since vice versa incompetence or bad language choices, such as imposing a sole language of work or communication, have for effect often concealed expenses much higher than the former.

Because of the complexity of interest, of the complexity of linguistic and socio-linguistic phenomena above all, a collective reflection has to be led in this field. These questions largely go beyond the context of isolated companies and call into question their global competitiveness and the competitiveness of the societies in which they are immersed. This reflection must aim at facilitating decision making and has therefore a strategic nature.

Research is consequently called on but it has to be confronted with the viewpoints of the companies and of the trade unions, for language and languages must make their entrance in social talks

The ambition of the second European Conference is to allow this collective reflection to take place on a European level.