

Anne Holmen  
anho@dpu.dk

## **ASEM Education Hub: Opening Conference, May 2005**

### **Foreign languages and cultural aspects of learning**

- 1) Language planning
- 2) Intercultural competence
- 3) Language learning and teaching methodology

#### **1) Language planning: for multilingualism or multiple monolingualism with English as the global foreign language?**

“Multiple transnational identities and affiliations will require new competences of European citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These include the ability to deal with increasing cultural diversity and heterogeneity. Multilingualism can be considered a core competence for such ability” (Extra & Yagmur, 2004, 16).

“Europe and India are comparable in their linguistic diversity, but they are different in their linguistic tradition. Europe, from the time of Renaissance, promoted monolingualism as part of nation-formation and many mother tongues were lost or marginalised (...). The current concern for multilingualism in Europe is a consequence of labour migration from other countries and of promoting a common economic space. The promotion of multilingualism in schools through bilingual education conflicts with the national ethos of many European countries. In India, on the other hand, multilingualism is part of the national ethos and the current preference for English at the risk of marginalising the Indian languages is part of the exercise for economic development” (Annamalai, 1995, 216-217).

Mother tongues vs. foreign languages > first, second, foreign languages

National, majority vs. regional/migrant minority > local, regional, national, transnational

Language competence as cultural identity vs. as linguistic instrumentalism > language education and language training as part of personal, social, cultural development

Traditional social hierarchy of languages > dynamic negotiable multilingualism

(e.g. Evans & Green 2003, Holmen & Jørgensen 1998, May 2003, Neau 2003, Risager 2003, Wee 2003)

Proposals for research cooperation on language planning:

- Sociolinguistic study of how to include information on language competence in census data (through surveys, tests, ethnographies and life histories)

- Survey study on instrumental, educational and cultural values of local, regional and transnational languages across countries with different language histories

## **2) Intercultural competence: general personal development or integral part of language learning?**

“As a process of developing intercultural competence, the learner needs to decentre from his/her own culture [...], and this can only happen as a result of a deliberate process of teaching which brings to the students the kind of exposure they need to begin the decentring process and the skills and knowledge to understand and interpret these experiences in order to achieve decentring. The study of language exposes learners to another way of viewing the world and develops flexibility and independence from a single linguistic and conceptual system through which to view the world” (Liddicoat 2004, 301)

What counts as appropriate culture for the language learner (Liddicoat 2004):

- high culture: literature, transmission of classic European schooling > national norms
- area studies: social studies, comparative perspective
- culture as societal norms: traditions, values, ethnographic perspective
- culture as social practice: contextualized, intercultural competence

Static view of culture > dynamic (culture as highly variable and constantly changing).

National > transnational paradigm (Risager 2003)

The nature of decentring processes in language education

Proposals for research cooperation on intercultural competence:

- The role of intercultural competence for learners in different learning situations (e.g. dependent on age, exposure to target language, contact with relevant social practice, motivation and interest in language learning, personal cultural background etc).
- The role of transnational communication for the development of intercultural competence
- Generalisability of academic/work place learning

## **3) Language learning and teaching: universal or culture specific methodologies?**

“A majority of students ... reported that their secondary English classes were largely teacher-fronted, with teacher talk usually taking up most of the class time. Teachers typically exercised tight control over the content and pace of lessons. They frequently explained grammatical rules to students and provided exemplary sentences illustrating the grammar rules taught. Contrastive analyses of English and Chinese were frequently conducted to draw students' attention to similarities and differences between the two languages. There were also constant teacher corrections of students' language errors. In addition, there were frequent grammar exercises (from English into Chinese and vice versa). In class, students were also often asked to read aloud texts and

dialogues in the textbooks. Finally, tests and quizzes were frequently given to test students' knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary. Instructional practices like these are typical of the time-honoured grammar-translation method" (Hu, 2003, 296-297).

"The philosophical rethinking and empirical efforts to understand the representations of self in social life have initiated much-needed changes in second language acquisition and English as a second language pedagogies" (on the struggle for voice in academic discourse, Canagarajah 2004, 266).

The balance between teaching and learning  
 The balance between communication practice and general systematic knowledge  
 Priorities of spoken and written language in different situations  
 Role of exposure and feedback  
 Motivation (Norton 1995: investment) and attitudes (Mistar 2001)  
 Language for different purposes: vocabulary, genres, priority of skills, finding a voice/adhering to norms.  
 Immersion vs. submersion programmes  
 Self access learning/out of class learning: priority of language learning strategies

Proposals for research cooperation on language teaching and learning:

- Survey on students' learning preferences and investment strategies in different social contexts and across transnational networks
- Comparative study of the role of first languages in foreign language learning
- Explorative analysis of multimodal literacy in language learning
- Comparison of teacher training and programmes for transnational contact between language teachers

## References

- Annamalai, N. (1995), Multilingualism for all: An Indian Perspective. In: Skutnabb-Kangas (ed.), *Multilingualism for all*. Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger.
- Canagarajah, S. (2004), Multilingual writers and the struggle for voice in academic discourse. In: Pavlenko & Blackledge (eds.), *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts*. Multilingual Matters
- Extra, G. & K. Yagmur (2004), *Urban Multilingualism in Europe*. Multilingual Matters
- Evans, S. & C. Green (2003), The use of English by Chinese professionals in post-1997 Hong Kong. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 24, 5. 386-412
- Holmen, A. & J. N. Jørgensen (1998), Teaching Majority and Minority Mother Tongues in Denmark. In: Tulasiewicz & Adams (eds.), *Teaching the mother tongues in multilingual Europe*. Cassell, 153-161
- Holmen, A. & K. Risager (2003), Language and culture teaching. Foreign languages and Danish as a second language. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 159, 93-108
- Hu, G. (2003), English Language teaching in China: regional differences and contributing factors. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 24, 4, 290-318

- Hyland, F. (2004), Learning autonomously: Contextualising out-of-class English language learning. *Language Awareness*, 13, 3, 180-202
- Liddicoat, A. (2004), The conceptualisation of the cultural component of language teaching in Australian language-in-education policy. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 25, 4, 297-317
- May, S. (2003), Rearticulating the case for minority language rights. *Current Issues in Language Planning*. Vol. 4, 2, 95-125
- Mistar, J. (2001), English learning strategies of Indonesian University Students across individual differences. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*, 11, 19-44
- Neau, V. (2003), The teaching of foreign languages in Cambodia: A historical perspective. *Language, culture and curriculum*, 16, 3, 253-268
- Norton, Peirce, B. (1995), Social identity, investment, and language learning. *TESOL quarterly*, 29, 1, 9-31.
- Risager, K. (2003), *Det nationale dilemma i sprog- og kulturpædagogikken*. Akademisk Forlag
- Wee, L. (2003), Linguistic Instrumentalism in Singapore. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. 24, 3, 211-224