



Network project for the decentralised and centralised
dissemination of TNP3 results and outcomes

NETWORK FOR THE DECENTRALISED AND CENTRALISED DISSEMINATION OF TNP3 RESULTS AND OUTCOMES (TNP3-D)

European Dissemination Conference
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*New developments in European society, enterprise, and education: the rationale
underlying TNP3*

Wolfgang Mackiewicz

Mr Chairman,

Colleagues from the European Commission,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Colleagues and friends,

At the start-up conference of our third full-fledged Thematic Network Project, held in Berlin in January 2003, I began my opening address by asking “Why do we need yet another Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages?” At the time, I could think of five major reasons.

- We needed to identify and define learning outcomes for higher education language studies which were relevant in economic and social terms.
- We needed to reach a better understanding of the skills and competences required in a rapidly changing language industry.
- In order to reach a clearer understanding of what was needed in the labour markets in general and in the language industry in particular, we needed to engage in concerted action with employers and other stakeholders.
- We needed to anchor higher education language provision in the lifelong learning paradigm.
- We needed to identify areas relevant to education that required new European knowledge, in other words, a European research effort.

Needless to say, these reasons were closely linked to the Bologna and Lisbon goals. They were policy oriented.

Of course, our predecessor projects, starting with SIGMA in 1994, had all been guided by the conviction that higher education programmes in the area of languages should respond to changing needs in the social, economic and political environments, including changes in higher education itself, changes resulting from, above all, European integration. In fact, the very definition of what we called “higher education language studies” or “the area of languages in higher education”, which had underpinned all our projects since SIGMA, was policy oriented. We defined the area of languages in terms of “transmission of linguistic and cultural knowledge, skills, and competences, and language mediation”. It was this policy-oriented definition that led us to adopt an all-encompassing, transversal typology of higher education language studies, ranging from teacher education and the training of translators and interpreters to language provision for students of all disciplines.

In a way, our comprehensive view of the multilingual challenge anticipated Commission President Barroso’s decision to create a portfolio for multilingualism, a portfolio which in Commission terms covers education and culture, translation, interpretation, and publications, but which, above all, highlights the fact that multilingualism is a transversal issue relevant to all policy fields.

As will be explained by my colleagues later this morning, we were also keen to talk to employers during the course of our first two TNPs – in fact, Brian Fox has just been talking about a specific aspect of this endeavour. But TNP3 was different. For the first time, we were guided by the conviction that what was needed was continuous, structured consultation and collaboration between universities and other stakeholders – and this for a number of reasons and purposes. For one thing, universities needed to gain a clearer understanding of changes in the labour markets, and of what was required of their graduates in the labour markets; for another, employers themselves had to reach a better understanding of their language and intercultural needs.

This, then, became our principal aims: (i) we wanted to establish which languages, skills and competences were required of higher education graduates – language specialists and non-specialists – in the labour markets; (ii) and we wanted to work towards consultation and collaboration between universities and stakeholders at all levels. We wanted to build bridges, as we put it in the theme of the TNP3 Closing Conference in Rennes a year ago.

Lis Lillie and Célio Conceição will report on what we did in order to achieve these aims. I would just like to mention what I should like to regard as one of the main results of TNP3 – modest though it may appear at first sight. For the first time, colleagues involved in our network made a determined effort to identify and analyse developments in the national and European economies with a view to understanding the linguistic implications of these developments. Or to put it the other way round: rather than taking the next best textbook on business English off the shelf, they made an effort to understand which languages, skills and competences their students needed to acquire in order to find appropriate jobs and to advance their professional careers.

Of course, it was not just Bologna and Lisbon that encouraged us to reflect on and engage in consultation and collaboration with stakeholders. By the year 2003 it was becoming clear that as a result of impending further expansion, the revival of the regions, the Single Market and increasing mobility within the Union, migration into Europe, and globalisation, the linguistic landscape of Europe and language use in Europe were going to change beyond what could possibly have been foreseen in the mid-nineties. And I think we were right. According to recent estimates, some 450 languages are spoken in Europe today. Practically all European states have become multilingual and multicultural societies. But not only that. The workforces of enterprises and the student bodies of universities across Europe are becoming increasingly international; European and international trade is now the order of the day – even for small and medium-sized enterprises.

However, it was not just the language constellation in Europe that was undergoing dramatic change at the time we launched TNP3. The advent of the knowledge society, linked to rampant developments in ICT, was bringing about fundamental changes in the labour markets, with traditional professions changing or disappearing completely, and new job profiles emerging. One of the most striking developments was, and still is, of course, the rise of an economically powerful and diverse language industry, going far beyond traditional translation and interpretation, requiring a host of new skills and competences, resulting in the creation of a new job profiles. I think we can take pride in the fact that many of our findings found their way into the Commission Communication “A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism” of November 2005. They are also referred to in Final Report of the Report of the Commission’s High Level Group on Multilingualism, which I had the privilege of presenting to Commissioner Orban yesterday.

The more aware we became of these developments, the more important it seemed to us to consult and collaborate with stakeholders, and the more aware we also become of the responsibility higher education institutions have for progress of the European project in general and for achieving the Lisbon goals in particular.

Through our work in TNP3, we found out that there are considerable differences across Europe as regards requirements in the labour markets, existing university programmes and provision, and contacts between universities and other stakeholders. This is why we launched the current one-year dissemination network project; this is why we decided to go to the four corners of Europe to present our ideas for discussion to colleagues and stakeholders out there, as it were. This is why we prepared regional synthesis papers focusing on the country groups covered by our four regional conferences. We were keen to find out to what extent our ideas and recommendations were deemed to be relevant by colleagues and stakeholders in those regions.

Yes, there are differences – but there are also huge differences in individual Member States and even cities. Last Friday, we held our last regional dissemination conference – in Warsaw. On a panel on “Linguistic and cross-cultural skills and competences for enhanced opportunities on the European and international labour markets” we had, among others, a representative of a major international company and a representative of a private employment agency. The person from the

international company sang the song of English only; the person from the employment agency sang a completely different song. English is a MUST, she said, but then she went on to present a list of no fewer than 16 what she described as key languages, ranging from German to Dutch, and from Hungarian to Lithuanian. She claimed that they could not find enough graduates having a high level of English and what she called “a decent level of a second foreign language”. I wonder to what extent this holds true for other Member States as well.

I am now being provocative. Maybe we should leave it to our students to decide which language or languages they want to continue learning at university or which language or languages they want to study from scratch. Maybe we should think more about learning outcomes relevant to graduate employability and to future language learning than to worry too much about the question of language choice. This is just an idea; it does not mean that in TNP3 and TNP3-D we did not find out which languages are currently most sought after in the labour markets. Célio and Lis will shortly talk about this issue. One thing is clear, though. Major non-Community languages such as Arabic, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese and Russian are becoming increasingly important too.

Before I conclude, I should like to thank the Hogeschool voor Wetenschap & Kunst and our colleagues Erik Uytterhoeven and Ludo Teeuwen for organising, supporting and hosting this Conference. I should like to thank you on behalf of the entire project partnership for the exceptionally warm reception extended to us here today. And I should like to thank the project external speakers, panel chairs and panellists for their great kindness in accepting our invitation to take a leading part in this conference.

Apparently, it is now fashionable for political leaders to declare that they are proud of something. Let me conclude by saying that I am proud of having had the privilege of sharing the TNP experience with so many colleagues from across Europe for some twelve years now. And I look forward to our discussions here today with keen anticipation.

Thank you for your attention.

