

**Teaching a Foreign Language and a Second Language
in a Multilingual Environment**

Summary of the meeting

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The factual framing outlined by Dr. F.-X. Fauvelle raised key issues, and- whilst showing the richness of this study day- let us perceive the risk. A thought, a memory, a culture but also a questioning accompanied by institutions, especially by a multidisciplinary and multinational representation.

The presentation of Mrs. Y. Gebremedhin stressed on the importance of sharing experiences in a particular context which is the development of French in Ethiopia, with different learning cultures and significant research opportunities(to which she also contributes under my supervision at the university of Paris VIII and at the Inalco), researches that must be put firmly for the service of education. She called for an intellectual and academic engagement, she who leads one component of the university. We are not at the university today because it is the alliance ethio française who is hosting us, but the university is everywhere: « universitas », turned towards all , curious of everything, in all directions.

In sum, it is on the institutional support that Mrs. M. Doublier insisted, and especially the support of the French Embassy that she personally represented, which led to the achievement of a common will: to contribute today for the development of knowledge and the educational policy at the highest level in this great country.

First, I would like to pay tribute to the organizers for the way they organized the voicing of opinions throughout the day. You will concede that in a conference you often say at one time or another: why did they give an importance to this or that, whose purpose seems unrelated to the theme of the day, not figuring in the program? Or on the contrary: why didn't they take into consideration this or that angle of approach that would have been more appropriate to address the problem? In short, it is sometimes too much and at some other times not enough. In my opinion, it is not the case in this conference.

The title given to this study day is an indicator of a good dynamic and is a proof of a total scientific coherence. It takes the framework (« *Context* ») as its starting point to go so far as the intervention (« *Teaching* »).

However, such a title “Teaching a foreign language and a second language in a multilingual environment” would be wisely reversed (as it will be shown by the two presenters): it is from the description of an environment with all its parameters (historical, linguistic, social, economic, cultural) that we can and should put in place a teaching/learning device for languages. Besides I note down that the title in English of this study day differs markedly from the French(no distinction between foreign language and second language, specification of the Ethiopian case of study), which has had an impact on the representations and therefore on the participants expectations.

In fact, the title must also function in both ways (« *Teaching* » vs « *Context* » and « *Context* » vs « *Teaching* »), inasmuch as praxeological didactic of languages calls for a back and forth movement between theory and practice moving constantly from concepts to field realities and from fields to concepts to bring about some changes.

Nevertheless, we must stress how much the structuring of works would facilitate the thinking , how much the “issues” (excellent English word with all its polysemy) and the treatment that has been done, how much the discussion that has followed, have responded in a better way to initial ambitions.

I will therefore remind the major ideas forwarded by the presenters, in putting them in perspective, and then I will come to the teachers' panel held in the afternoon and that led to an appropriate workshop, which initiated a debate. My conclusion, in the form of an opening, will dare to draw some possibilities that, I hope, will be opened up one day or another.

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We first heard *Mr. Thomas Osmond* placing “Language and ethnicity in an anthropological perspective” through the case of contemporary Ethiopia. In the examination of a linguistic policy based on the “nationality” concept, the dissection was in fact necessary: nationality, ethnicity and language are concepts based on substantial categories that can be (and are elsewhere) actually highly criticized. Here, the history of languages is inscribed in its historical and political framework, in a tension towards a “new imaginary multinational”. Mr. Osmond shows that the Ethiopian identity mosaic is a lot more sophisticated than that given by a “traditional “ethnic classification. The specific studies he did about the religion, the place of media and specially of television, are enlightening. But we need to go further.

It would have been great that we left to consider in terms of linguistic policy, different scenarios to accredit the inadequacy of those who are actually put in place. There are not so many. India ? Switzerland? Seychelles ? Most of the respectable local languages linguistic utopias as defined by the Unesco, for example in its 2005 declaration, thwarted on the realities: A primary concern which is not that of respecting differences but the desire of a "will to live together”(Renan) an unbearable economic cost to societies that have other priorities than languages management; methodological difficulties that depend on the corpus of speeches in use (the grammatical tools , the norm, the spelling, the literary production, the spread/dissemination, the training of speakers and the representation related to the languages): this way, can we ask ourselves that the same will apply to the “founding myth” that is being developed by the European Union around the theme of its multilingualism. Mr. Thomas Osmond speech ended with an impression that was not followed by any underpinning argument“ The fiction.... promoted by the Ethiopian state heritage hardly thrill only tourists and international donors”. We think that nobody is delighted but we still need to make choices and act, which is the urgency facing the policy and not the anthropologist. The critical look of the scientist sees things that the politician cannot dwell upon because the objectives of the latter is global - operating the educational system, ensuring the communication throughout the country - and his categories of thought and even his conception of the common good , are not those of the researcher.

Two good remarks came from the audience: first a reminder that consisted in saying that the first thing is to help humans communicate and escape above all from Babel. Then was a remark that the informal situations studies need not to be confused with that of official vehicular systems and of the education: There is room for every possible coexistences and all the code switching, those of Amarinya, Oromifa and others, in the family and private circle.

It is undeniable that if, from the 60s, the multilingual model had been questioned by the social sciences; they did not propose applicable policies. In other terms, the critics of the classifications cannot lead to a rejection of these. The ideologies are at work and if “saying is doing” it is also dominating. Separating “them” and “us”, commanding the world (the American “Indians”, or the natural environment like the classification of Linné) is in deed questionable because the signifiers are “floating” and the signified are arbitrary. But we must classify as a last resort. The final suggestion of Dr. Osmond, that would be to “dilute” ethnicity in favor of a social reconstitution related to interrelations, gather a little about him.

It is precisely on the treatment of languages management – but this time on second and foreign languages - that Dr. Hailom Banteyerga did his presentation.

He started by a historical presentation, the first contacts, the first migrations during the Second World War. Then the great redistributions of maps after 1945 in the Horn of Africa , as in the rest of the world, with the expansion of English, then the Anglo-American and the development of education.

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How can we say the teaching of English has not reached its objectives? The answer is stinging; it is a teaching that is qualified as superficial and commercial. The speaker does not hesitate to say: "It's all blinding and robbing," You cannot say better than that.

We are then driven by Thomas Osmond to the management of language policy and its ideological weight: multilingualism as an opportunity and a challenge!

Our colleague takes the case of Ethiopia as a historic example of multilingualism, fed from past failures and trying at least to organize the process ... a process which should lead to equal treatment of all languages bearing in mind that Amharic is attributed and "additional role," or let's say extra role: it is used as a common language, but with due recognition to other languages which may also be used as common languages as necessary. No limit ("ceiling"), is imposed on the "local" languages.

So, in this context, where do we find the foreign languages, especially English? Dr. Hailom sees no particular ideological significance to their use, even in the case of English. His arguments are interesting and there is no "umbrella" Anglophone policy, unlike what can be observed with regard to French speaking African countries. It is not the country's main concern: the main purpose of the existence of modern foreign languages in Ethiopia would have been to contribute, through openness, intellectual development and a better perception of "events" that occur in the near sphere far from the individual, to a better understanding between persons, between people. The speaker assigns high ambitions in the teaching / learning foreign languages in his country by giving them back, alongside the national languages, a role that goes beyond the horizons of the market and tell us about values. It is only an issue of ideology, but in every sense of the term.

The presentation of Abebayehu Messele and Endashaw W.Michael would show the link between this complex and in the process of structuring which is the official multilingualism in Ethiopia and teaching / learning foreign languages in the country. They started by providing a simple definition of what are foreign languages: those who are not indigenous. The presenters continued by focusing quantitative data collected from the site ethnologue.com with the approximations linked to this kind of census. We think, for example, that Mandarin ("*pu tong hua*") is a language commonly spoken in China. Here lies the whole issue of the observation of languages, with oppositions or clear differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches, demography and political objectivity and scientific use of data they provide. Thus, in France, the question of an ethnic census is the subject of a very current debate in society.

It appears from reading of the data presented by the speakers that we can have doubts on the total of languages and speakers, as is always the case in situations which seem much simpler at first, like those of insular states with limited surface (the Seychelles an example from the Indian Ocean, or Haiti in the Caribbean).

If we consider the Ethiopian situation by reducing it to the two major families of Afro-Asiatic and Nilo-Saharan languages, we can insert a rationale which is the substrate of the teaching / learning process of foreign languages of the nation. This rationale must reconcile the motives of the constituent groups of the country (provinces, communities, families, students ...) and the intentions of the decision body and the whole system, thus paving the way for the promotion of "hidden agenda" and may be conflicting with the intentions of the formers.

This leads to a discussion on: why do we learn a foreign language? In some cases, if the degree of vehicularity of a language is low, we must look elsewhere for reasons to learn that language. I give a simple example, taken in context of the European university: globalization has made it that international students (Erasmus programme students) have little need to learn Czech or Dutch to study when classes are often given in English in the institutions they will attend. Nor can we hide the acculturation that follows, at times, the learning of a new language, with

questions that arise on the prestige attached to such language, with a new level of profitability favoring another. The source language is too often considered as an obstacle to the expansion of the linguistic repertoire: in "learner's variety", it is the negative interferences that are highlighted, and we limit ourselves in the analysis of errors. But the new approach, the cutting of the reality (we are talking here of course about the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis) is constructed from the mutual enrichment of the speeches in the consciousness of the learner, not from a conflict.

We will focus on the consequences of multilingualism with respect to language policy the induced effects on the learning of foreign languages. Two types of consequences:

- the parallel, or rather the correlation, between the promotion of education in mother tongue and the low level of competence in English which is the medium of instruction in the country.
- the observation that some students could not even understand the Amharic language which is the official language and the nationally recognized vehicular language.

The subtlety of the analysis but also the ambiguity (reliability of the numbers given, outcomes of educational action) in addition to some of the comments of the presenters lead us, in conclusion, to say that if multilingualism is an "advanced" idea (the use of this word is questionable) and therefore that must be encouraged, the management of multilingualism is a burning need, but also a source of problems of great variety.

Baye Yiman Mekonnen who followed in the presentations focused on the conceptual difficulties encountered by amharophone English learners. We enter with him into the actual didactic aspect of our day and fortunately, it is with a modern definition of didactic, enriched by science and related fields, that he starts his presentations.

The question is: what do we know or believe to have known when we learn a word in a foreign language? We will not go into the very rigorous process that followed the speaker in looking successively different angles of the vocabulary of English for its ownership: phonology, morphosyntax, spelling, extensions (connotations).

The second question is: how do we know? It depends on semantic categories (for example, how do we know the meaning of "democracy"?) and on the construction by combination of relations (analogies, differences, consequences, allowing "*injera*" to be the symbol of Life in the Amharic language) and on cultural references. Dr. Yiman has fully demonstrated the difficulties of conceptual categorization that a learner encounters, difficulties linked both to pragmatic and semantic ("*I'm his girl*" instead of "*I'm his daughter*"). These different examples, often tasty, reinforce the strong points of our modern teaching, anxious to adopt the intercultural approach and knowing that it is not needed to learn everything, but wanting at least "to minimize the difficulties". We have been able to measure, through this communication, how important is the contribution of linguistics to modern and open teaching. The issues raised here raise questions about the content, and on an issue that we can't avoid: that of the standard. If English is, in Ethiopia, "legitimized" ("*certified*"), considered as an "academic" English in its objectives, we can't forget that in reality, it encounters all varieties, including those of Anglo-American varieties but also endogenous varieties or varieties coming from neighboring countries. The case of the Ethiopian girl speaking English "*in the middle of nowhere*" was mentioned ... The specialists of French as a foreign and second language will also find interesting points in this paper to reflect on the "African" varieties of French and their acceptability in the school or even their "*teachability*", Pienemann.

I found out from the teachers who followed the presentations of the morning that the diversity of languages and methodologies could give rise to large variety of practices. This variety is justified by the heterogeneity of languages themselves, their specificity, their history in the country, the educational cultures that embed them. French language, for example, derives its

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originality not only from a shared history with Ethiopia and its elites, but also from the Alliance or the Lycee Gebre Mariam or even from the presence of the African Union in Addis Ababa.

The workshop was concluded by giving the floor to the audience that should be praised for its curiosity and active involvement. The educational and methodological priorities do not easily emerge from a collective speech: the aspects singled out touched both the rich potential of multilingualism and the expectations of individuals or the mutations of cultures in contact and conflict. The “priorities” are relative, ephemeral, depending on the current situation and subjective.

My general conclusion, “at the end of the day” will be, as mentioned earlier, to pave the way in finding suggestions: to be examined, deepened and widened. My comments focus on four key points, which are all obtained from the works done:

- identifying of the experiential and scientific field which is the one of Ethiopian multilingualism;
- *working on the necessary concepts* so that we talk a common scientific language;
- a way forward *to link theory and practice*, so that words do not remain just words;
- *emphasizing on the role of trainers as cultural mediators*, including teachers, in developing a harmonious multilingualism.

I observe then, first, that we have seen an extensive coverage of the experiential and scientific field, in an increasingly tight approach, from the “macro” to “micro-sociolinguistics”, from Article 39.1 of the Ethiopian Constitution to the learner, his profile, his performances, his difficulties and his hopes.

Secondly, a substantial work has been done on the concepts, their relationships to contexts and especially to original context, that of multilingualism in Ethiopia. The tools must be efficient, more efficient: even if the resource centers, libraries and media centers exist, internet will be the first tool of the future learning of multilingualism, which will often be partially self-learning.

Thirdly, we have seen, in this very short day, the link between theory and practice:

- the learner with its multilingual repertoire
- the methodologies (“re-read” the communicative approach, the CEF)
- the technology

It appears that the use of ICT, modern technologies used in the service of education, (a powerful tool for knowledge of multilingualism as shows the site of the Council of Europe or the one of Laval University in Quebec) is still insufficient in training practices and it is certain that its development remains a priority.

As for the education engineering, it is taking an interesting image in Ethiopia, where we see consolidated efforts in national ministerial initiatives thus decentralized actions, for example the efforts of the University of Addis Ababa to harmonize its curricula and develop new courses, and the efforts of regional universities who introduce some balance into language teaching with a diversification that is welcomed.

Fourthly, the teacher, trainer, educator have, among the cultural mediators, between students, parents, the social body, a very important role. It was good to insist on those without whom anything can be done in this area, which leads to the thinking on many issues concerning the teacher:

- its origin (linguistic, native / non-native relationship...)
- his didactic, educational, civic training
- his material, cultural and moral situation.

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It is obvious that it is a systemic view of all these factors that need to be successful, each interacting with the others and being influenced, as it influences them. The development of a harmonious multilingualism does not arise spontaneously: it is a matter of education, work and patience.

What is the way forward now? This text is published or given to put online a few months after the workshop. It differs slightly from the oral version that I produced *in situ* in the great hall of the Alliance - packed that day. Because the thoughts that we have had in March 2009 are continuing and I am happy to help prolong it. I would like the following propositions be realized. We will find short term perspectives and others more long term, actions to imagine and implement in the long term.

I think everything revolves around the concept of sharing between those involved in disseminating languages:

- Exchange of addresses, publications or putting online;
- Structuring of research mainly in the University of Addis Ababa but with greater openness to the outside (in Ethiopia, in the vast region between Djibouti, the Indian Ocean and Southern Africa, and organizing periodic meetings like this.
- Cooperation between networks that include research centers worldwide which are easily accessible via the Internet, such as those affiliated to the “*University Agency of Francophony*” (I coordinate a network of over 400 researchers, “*Dynamic of Languages and Francophony*”, where we give the term “partnership” all its meaning).

It is in the projects we will implement together, on the follow ups that will be given to this exciting meeting that we can judge the seriousness of our common reflection and the strength of our assertions.

Betam amesege nellehu, Thank you, Merci à vous.