

TABLE RONDE 8

Le plurilinguisme comme réalité économique pour l'enseignement supérieur

10 novembre 2022, 13:00 heures – à distance OEP - Universidad de Cádiz Travailleurs plurilingues, entreprises monolingues. Quelle place pour l'université dans la résolution de ce hiatus?

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PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- I. Multilingualism and professional environments
- II. State of the art of research on multilingualism and the business world
 - III. The MultilinVR project: aims and results
 - IV. Findings from the questionnaire
 - V. Conclusion





Research questions

Globalized economy:

- work environments are cross-linguistic places, cross-cultural environments;
- growing presence of foreign workers requires policies aimed at their rapid and effective integration;
 so, it is often said that multilingualism contributes to the overall prosperity.

But: the reality is much more varied! Look at the researches carried out by :

- L. A. Barth (Divergences between "saying" and "doing");
- G. Lüdi (linguistic landscape as a tool for the analysis of language management in companies).

We began by asking ourselves these kinds of questions:

- 1. What hinders the full recognition and valorisation of the plurilingual and pluricultural competence of employees of foreign origin?
- 2. Why is it only the employees' initiative to try to fill the structural gaps in the professional contexts?
- 3. In short, what prevents companies from adopting a linguistic policy **explicitly** oriented towards the valorisation of multilingualism?





Background

International studies have shown that there is a clear link between employees' language skills and the success of export activities:

- European linguistic diversity is a major asset to develop knowledge, stimulate the economy (qualitative aspects of multilingualism);

A good number of recent publications insist on the importance of conscious internationalization as a catalyst for productivity.

Research also confirms the **competitive advantage represented by multilingualism** (Carrère et al. 2016; Hogan-Brun 2017; Gazzola 2017; Gazzola & Mazzacani 2017):

- 2010 PIMLICO project Best practices in 40 SMEs in the 27 EU countries; Development of a dedicated guide for companies;

This advantage has become even more crucial in light of the globalized economy, where the "all-English" model is no longer sufficient:

- 2006 ELAN (Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Languages Skills in Enterprise)
 - negative impact due to lack of language skills in companies;

Studies by French and Francophone institutions have paid attention to the socio-political value of language and the impact of English in the workplace:

- "Good language practices in companies (DGLFLF, OQLF, 2013)
- "What languages are spoken in companies in France?", (Truchot, DGLFLF, 2015).





Background in Italy

- Repères-Dorif no. 4, 2013
- Featuring articles by linguists, economists and representatives of the professional world ("What lurilingualism for what multilingual professional environment?");
- A few recent studies have analysed plurilingual practices in Italian (and European) companies, based on the testimonies of professionals:
- "Plurilingual practices in international workplaces: between linguistic policies and actual uses" (Lejot, 2015); "Plurilingualism and the world of work: between needs, challenges and strategies. Multilingualism and the Labour Market: Language Needs, Challenges and Strategies", (Gerolimich, Vecchiato, 2016)
- Some other studies (Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany) on the role of language skills in the internationalization of companies, none on Veneto region.





MultilinVR Project

Università di Verona, Dipartimento di Lingue e letterature straniere (Riba & Progetto di Eccellenza 2018-2022)

Duration: 2019-2021

Acronym

"Multilingualism in business in and around Verona: a catalyst for internationalization".

Objectives

- fill this knowledge gap
- auditing foreign language practices
- proposing possible solutions to the lack of linguistic skills





MultilinVR Project in details

The research was carried out using a **customized questionnaire** (quantitative research, 51 closed questions and 31 follow-up and *relais* questions) on **language needs**, administered to a significant sample of companies (119) using a dedicated website.

The results of this survey provided a **diagnosis** that identified specific needs, particularly in terms of:

- language policy in internal and external communication
- company investment in language training for employees
- the impact of language skills in hiring strategies.

The final phase was therefore a quality language training, focused on the lexical, terminological and communicative needs of the companies, in a multilingual perspective.





The language training

1 pilot edition (free of charge and in collaboration with the large-scale project on *Digital Humanities;* infrastructures and resources)

2nd and 3rd edition as part of the formative offer of the University of Verona;

- Multilingual: 3 languages (French, German, Spanish)
- Blended
 - synchronous in class synchronous on Zoom asynchronous on Moodle.ext

- Tailored and à la carte activities



Dipartimento di LINGUE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE



The Questionnaire. Some remarks on companies facing the multilingualism of society and the plurilingualism of workers

- In many workplaces there is still only a basic "bricolage" (Lavric, 2012);
- Companies are still struggling to embrace the paradigm shifts brought about by multilingualism:

All-English is still the dominant model

This is despite the fact that:

- Brexit has created the need to discuss the place of English, and its role as a lingua franca (Tietze 2004);
- The plurilingual profile and plurilingual repertoires of workers
- The **presence of workers** with languages other than that of the country where they work
- Misunderstandings in professional communication (Mauranen 2006)

Workers' discomfort (Neeley 2013)

The illusions of *globish* are no longer a surprise (Canale et al. 2014; Tréguer-Felten 2018):

- It is also worth noting that companies, even when **recruiting**, often **poorly define their language requirements and needs**;
- As a result: just employee self-initiative.





A few explanations

The belief that **English** is **enough**:

that everyone speaks it, understands it, has studied it;
 (overestimation of the degree of English proficiency);

However, we are well aware of the inequality of the teaching of English:

according to context, level of education, experiences;

For companies, relying on English is not a burden:

– in terms of commitment, training, taking on the communicative part of the job;

There is a general belief that English is faster, immediate, does not require intermediaries;





A few explanations

- The linguistic part of the job is of interest, concern and worry exclusively to the workers who have to deal with it on a daily basis;
- The company, on the other hand, does not consider this aspect as a necessity of its own. Therefore, there is **no investment in terms of explicit policies and training** (It is possible that only managers receive *ad hoc* training, often organized by the company);
- The worker is also looking for a form of **reward, career advancement** or decides to train out of passion, personal motivation and individual initiative.





A few explanations

Despite all the recommendations, language proficiency is not considered a worker skill;

It is not what the company is banking on because there is **not full awareness** of the benefits and advantages;

In addition, there is a bias against the foreign worker, who is considered incapable of using his or her language repertoire because he or she perhaps mishandles the language of the country in which he or she is working.





What is the role of the university in resolving this gap?

- 1. Create awareness of the importance of foreign language proficiency in business:
 - Opening event on the challenges of multilingualism for civil society and the press
- 2. Encourage companies to **implement practical language policies** in order to find structured and functional solutions to their communication needs;
- 3. Invite companies to constantly monitor their language skills needs and adopt explicit language policies;
- 4. Innovate in the hiring process;
- 5. Strengthen lifelong learning:
 - free training and/or very affordable costs;
 - provide follow-up (ex. expertise)
- partnering with the city or with associations with close ties to the local production network (in our case, a close collaboration with the Verona branch of Confindustria - Federation of Italian Employers);
- 6. In this direction, to rely on the complementarity of projects with the same purpose;
- 7. Participate in or encourage business investment in internationalization:
 - multilingual websites, professional translations, interpreting;





Final remarks

First academic study on Verona region;

The originality: provide concrete tools to meet the needs of companies for specialized linguistic knowledge;

Project's potential application and social and economic impact.

SMEs in the Verona area are already efficient exporters:

– internationalization must be transformed into an opportunity, especially by investing in human capital, cooperation and trying to raise awareness among managers.

MERCI!

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