

MIME Expert meeting

On Multilingualism in Primary and Secondary Education in the Netherlands

University of Amsterdam, 15 March 2016

Report for the Stakeholders Meeting

Third MIME Consortium meeting, Faro, Portugal , 15 June 2016

The expert meeting on Multilingualism in Primary and Secondary Education in the Netherlands was a joined initiative of the University of Amsterdam and Windesheim, University of Applied Sciences, Zwolle. It was organized by Karijn Helsloot, Windesheim and by Virginie Mamadouh, László Marác and Federico Gobbo (University of Amsterdam and MIME). The meeting was dedicated to language diversity in the classroom, to national policies about multilingual education and to language learning. The objectives were to contribute to the national debate with a clear call for multilingualism in education, and to reach out to partner organisations and stakeholders at the local and the national level.

Some twenty professionals participated in the meeting, ranging from academics (in linguistics and in social studies) to teacher trainers, school principals, and policy makers at the national and the municipal level.

Two main objectives were identified:

1. Sensitization to multilingualism. All pupils with another home language than Dutch (the national school language), are not only allowed but also invited to use their own language knowledge in the learning process at school. Teachers and school staff will welcome the home languages of the children, instead of banning them from school. Regarding the national education policies, the taken for granted monolingual orientation must be replaced by a multilingual one.
2. Language learning: All pupils are encouraged to learn from an early age on three languages: 1) the national language Dutch, 2) the European and international lingua franca English, and 3) language X. This language X can be the home language of the pupil if it is different from Dutch or English, but eventually, any language could be

chosen. The educational system should provide learning opportunities in these languages as well as appropriate assessments and examinations.

A number of short presentations by academics and practitioners (Nesrin El Ayadi (UvA/MIME), Vittorio dell'Aquila (UNIMB/MIME), Leendert-Jan Veldhuyzen (DENISE), Enoch Aboh (UvA), Karijn Helsloot (Windesheim), Federico Gobbo (UNIMB/MIME)) shed light on various aspects related to these two objectives and were followed by a lively discussion.

The implications of the adoption of the first objective are considerable at the professional level, regarding both the teacher training programmes, the curricula, and the development of teaching materials. **Allowing all languages in the classroom as a resource for (language) learning,**

- A. presupposes that teachers have a basic knowledge of linguistics. The focus in teacher training is presently on vocabulary building and the primary skills of reading and writing, in the school languages Dutch and English. Grammar and general linguistics receive far less attention in the undergraduate programmes for primary school teachers. A focus on *Sharing Grammars* is needed, meaning: allow the pupils to discover grammatical convergences and divergences between the languages spoken in the classroom;
- B. requires an integrated approach to language education in general. Language education entails both *learning the national language* and *education in the national language*, but has to expand beyond that. Since English is being taught more and more from an early age onwards, Dutch and English should function as reference points in the sensitization to multilingualism through sharing grammars;
- C. is not restricted to language classes: it should be incorporated in the teaching of mandatory subjects such as Economics, History, Literature and to many (optional) others including Arts. It includes subjects like World orientation, Citizenship, Empowerment, Internationalisation, Cultural awareness or Intercultural communication;
- D. implies the development of new curricula as well as appropriate learning materials for the initial teacher training, the retraining of teachers and the training on the job of entrants on the educational job market;
- E. has a considerable impact on social aspects relating to the wellbeing of pupils and teachers, on the fight against discrimination and prejudices, which require specific training programmes;
- F. entails the involvement of the parents and other family members and relatives, since these family nuclei may constitute the sole practice of the home language. The students may be so-called second or third generation immigrants, and, as such, may hardly been exposed to a rich and diverse language societal environment in their home language;
- G. may cause a temporary slowdown in the acquisition of the main school language, but at the end of the school career, the achieved skills are expected to be similar, while the wellbeing of the students has gained considerably under this approach, as has been observed in practice by the school principal of the international school DENISE;
- H. may benefit from tools like plan languages, like Esperanto or Europanto, as well as secret languages, to raise the pupils' awareness of their implicit linguistic knowledge

and skills, monolinguals and multilinguals alike. By experiencing 'language as a bridge' (within their own group) versus 'language as a wall' (keeping non class members outside), these language games strengthen not only the linguistic, but also the social and cognitive abilities of these pupils. It makes them sensitive to inclusion and exclusion processes;

- I. finally, *allowing all languages in the classroom as a resource for (language) learning* presupposes a clear and outspoken support at the national policy level, and requires substantial financial support from both national and municipal authorities.

The second objective is an adaptation of the principle formulated by the Council of Europe some 25 years ago, and adopted 10 years later by the European Council: all European citizens should acquire three languages. It is known as the 1+2 formula, i.e. mother tongue plus two additional languages. At the time, the three languages were thought to be the *national* languages of European states. Nowadays, other languages are included in the mix: regional languages, minority languages, migrant languages as well as languages used outside Europe. Allowing all pupils in the Netherlands to learn a language of one's choosing, in addition to Dutch and English, will have strong implications on the organizational and logistic level, as well as on the professional and the financial ones.

- J. The objective is that all pupils in the Netherlands from early age on are supported by the educational system to learn three languages, the national language Dutch, the lingua franca English, and a third language X. This language X can be the home language of the pupil, if it is different from Dutch or English, including regional and migrant languages. But in principle it can be whatever language parents/children want to choose. Since the necessity of Dutch and English is well established in the Netherlands, the principle should be rephrased 2+1: Dutch and English, *plus a language X*.
- K. Traditionally, foreign languages are introduced in secondary school, with the exception of English which is compulsory from the final two years of primary school onwards, i.e. starting from age 10. Since 2015, however, primary schools may start in the first year to teach a foreign language, i.e. to 4 years old children. A very few number of schools start with early German or French, most schools chose English.
- L. If a pupil speaks at home another language than Dutch or English, the improvement of that language should also start right from the beginning in primary school. Deliberately creating a learning gap of 8 years, between their 4 and 12 years age, would be detrimental.
- M. The Dutch ministry of education provides baccalaurean exams in Dutch, English, French and German, but also in Frisian, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Turkish, and soon in Chinese too. However, pupils and their parents very often do not know about the possibility to choose a modern foreign language other than German or French in addition to compulsory English. Schools may not inform parents and pupils properly, because of fearing high costs: they might have to hire expensive language teachers for just a few students.
- N. Recently, the Dutch minister of education has commissioned a study for a new future-proof curriculum. Three core competencies have been chosen: Dutch, English and Maths. Moreover, only Dutch and English are explicitly mentioned when it comes to compulsory language education. German and French are no longer the other

privileged foreign languages. This means that in principle all languages can be offered by a school, the decisions of which will be taken by the school, not by the ministry. The advice has caused considerable controversy since the learning of German and French is not compulsory anymore, while both languages are deemed so important for the Dutch economy. From a multilingual perspective, the recommendation allows for more variation, and is therefore attractive.

- O. In principle, each pupil may choose her/his own language X, whether this language is her/his home language or not. A monolingual Dutch pupil may choose German or Spanish but also Turkish or Sranantongo. A bilingual pupil Turkish and Dutch may choose Turkish but just as well Spanish or Sranantongo. The levels of language skills may diverge strongly between pupils of the same age, but the same *minimum* end terms should be targeted. Personalized learning trajectories are required, such that the learning process is tailored to the knowledge and experience of the learners.
- P. The learning of language X takes place formally and informally, i.e. at home, online, in peer groups, but also in the school, during regular school time. The teaching (in class or virtually from a distance) is done by professionally schooled teachers (unlike earlier practices with mother tongue instruction in the Netherlands in the 1980s and 1990s).
- Q. At school, *hybrid teaching* and *blended learning*, a mixture of online programmes, guidance at a distance and regular classroom encounters, are the only feasible approach to sustain education in a large number of languages X.
- R. Individual tailor-made trajectories are necessary as pupils can move and attend a new school where a different language mix is offered than in their original school.
- S. For practical reasons, teaching support in other languages than English, French and German, will be introduced in a stepwise process: first the five most frequently requested languages, than the next five etc., so that the Ministry, the trainers and the publishers can develop proper materials and training programmes.
- T. Examination will be formalized in accordance with the terms of the Common European Framework of References (CEFR).

A follow-up meeting in Amsterdam is planned 11 October 2016.

Karijn Helsloot & Virginie Mamadouh
Amsterdam 7 June 2016 (final version 28 June 2016)