

POSTPRINT

Summary of the panel discussion at the 19th Annual EFNIL Conference in Vilnius

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A panel discussion chaired by Andreas Witt from the Leibniz Institute for the German Language rounded off the 19th Annual EFNIL Conference in Vilnius. Three panelists participated in the event: Amira-Louise Ouardalitou from the Institut Grand-Ducal in Luxembourg, Aurelija Tamulionienė from the Institute of the Lithuanian Language and Dimitrios Koutsogiannis from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

All of the panelists also gave presentations in previous sessions at the Conference: Aurelija Tamulionienė, the deputy director of the Institute of the Lithuanian Language, talked about Migration and Linguistic Integration in Lithuania (Session 1: Multiculturalism and Multilingualism), Amira-Louise Ouardalitou spoke about Language and Migration in Luxembourg (Session 2: Multilingual Workplace) and Dimitrios Koutsogiannis' contribution was about Immigrant Children's Language Practices and their Implications for Language Policy and Teaching (Session 3: Migration and Language Learning). Since each panelist presented at a different session of the Conference, during the panel discussion they could not only speak on their own behalf but also recapitulate the ideas discussed and developed during the session they had participated in.

The question addressed to all of the panelists was the areas in which a national policy would be preferable and those in which European regulation would be necessary.

Aurelija Tamulionienė from Lithuania talked about the similarities and differences in linguistic integration in different countries and how it could be approached. As illustrated during the previous sessions of the conference, all EFNIL countries face migration and issues resulting from language integration. The approaches to this problem and the solutions adopted differ from country to country. Countries where the national language is one with a relatively small number of speakers face different problems than countries whose national languages are more widely spoken. The so-called international languages (English, German and French) are understandably in a better position as migrants are motivated to learn these languages. The subject of education is open to debate, and it must be in the interests of both the immigrants and the population of the host country that the former learn the language. It can be observed that all countries make significant efforts at national levels: with the legal framework in place, it is only a matter of applying it. The recent increase in migration from Ukraine raised questions about how we

can help refugees integrate. The conference focused on solutions for different countries. Some countries educate children from Ukraine in mainstream schools while other countries have the option for Ukrainians to study in Russian. It is questionable whether this is the right solution as it increases not only linguistic but also social exclusion.

Amira-Louise Ouardalitou from Luxembourg spoke next. Since 1984, her country has had three official languages (Luxembourgish, French and German) but English and Portuguese are also commonly used due to immigration. English is generally spoken as a foreign language. Workplaces in Luxembourg are highly multilingual and not completely free from cases of language discrimination; in particular, skilled and experienced professionals may not occupy the place they deserve in the professional hierarchy due to language barriers (e.g. their inability to speak Luxembourgish). Moreover, people who do not speak the three official languages of Luxembourg cannot work in the public sector, regardless of their merits. The Lithuanian policy of language integration for migrants was acknowledged as a positive example and a solution that Luxembourg might follow.

Dimitrios Koutsogiannis, who spoke as the last panelist, made two points: firstly, he pointed out that in today's world purely local issues do not exist. While it is interesting to study and discuss national solutions to problems related to language and migration, international coordination is always welcome. Such coordination at European level could consist, at the very least, in organizing regular meetings during which ideas on relevant questions could be discussed, experiences exchanged and valuable lessons learned from one another. According to Koutsogiannis, EFNIL could be an appropriate forum for such coordinating activities. The panelist's second, more theoretical, point was that the question of language policy is often perceived through the lens of nation states (he quoted the use of terms such as L1, L2 as an example), which is anachronistic. The biggest challenge for structuring the common European debate on these issues is, in fact, how to re-imagine personal identities in the post-national world. At the end of his short speech, Koutsogiannis formulated the following practical questions, which could be addressed by EFNIL in the future:

- 1) How to construct a European forum for a continuous exchange of information concerning initiatives developed in different countries related to inward and outward migration?
- 2) How to construct a scientific forum aiming to revise dominant assumptions about language and nationality, giving a push towards a post-national, cosmopolitan perspective.

The chair then gave the floor to the audience. In relation to Koutsogiannis' contribution, Johan Van Horde commented that within EFNIL there were two conflicting views on the role of language in society: the first, based on 19th century romantic nationalism, advocates a strong connection between nationality and language; the

other one, represented by Koutsogiannis, is post-national. In the first one, language is seen as an element that builds ties within national communities; in the second, to which Johan Van Hoorde himself subscribes, a national language is what allows us to build bridges within and between societies, without imposing the use of one language in a given territory.

In his closing remarks, the chair of the panel session expressed his satisfaction about the fact that EFNIL addresses questions related to language, migration and identity, trying to find similarities but also differences in existing approaches. He hopes that in the future (even though, he realizes, this can take one or two generations) every European will be free to speak their native language in all communications regardless of the context. Before this happens, however, national language institutions, even in monolingual countries, should support multilinguality, e.g. by providing various forms in all European languages, as enabled by existing machine translation tools.